

PLUCK AND LUCK

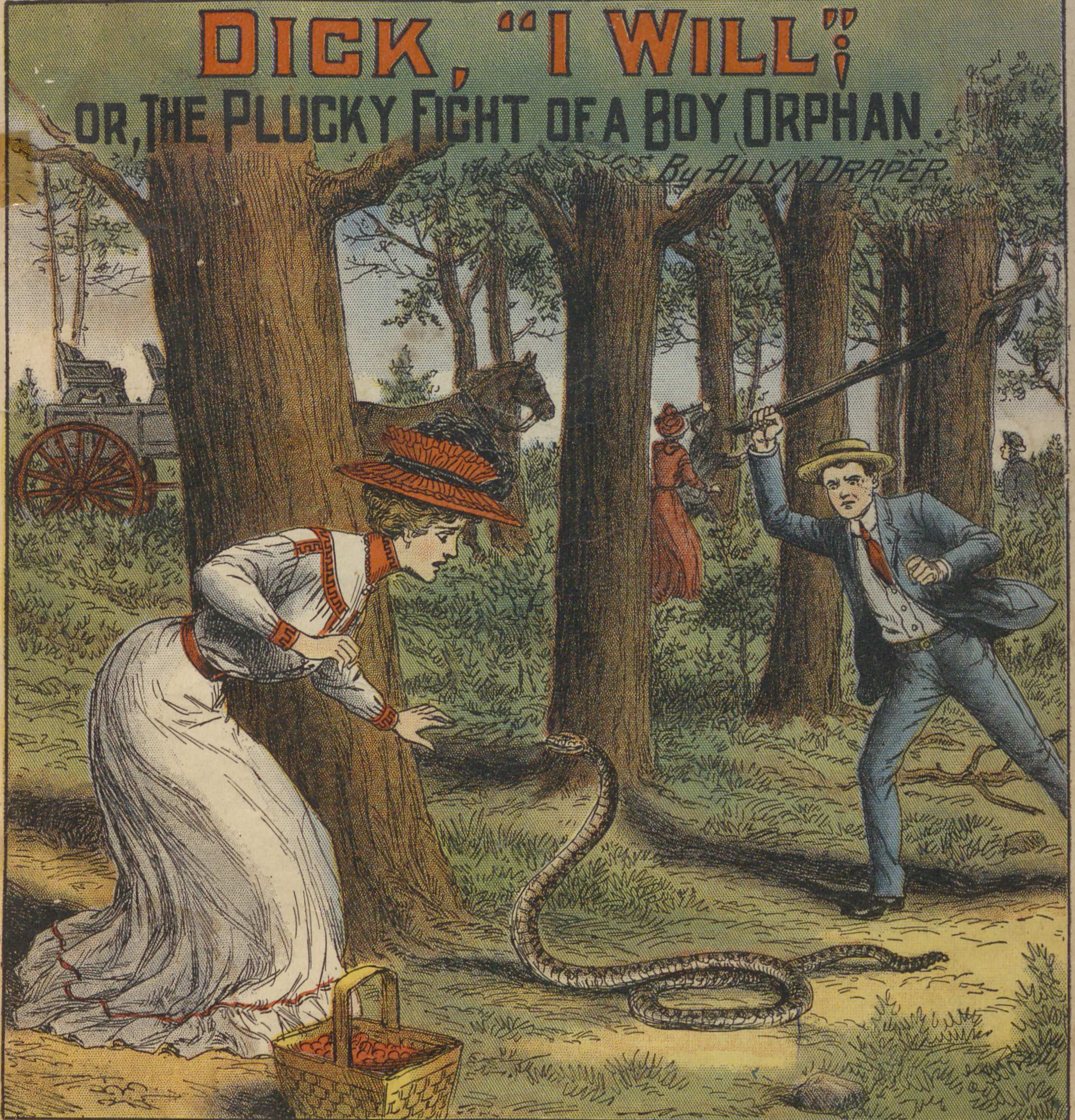
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

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NEW YORK, DECEMBER 30, 1908.

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Never stopping to think what the result might be, he gathered his muscles together, and with a swift, agile bound was upon the hideous serpent. His face was actually bloodless—his eyes gleaming—his teeth set.

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DICK "I WILL"

—OR—

The Plucky Fight of a Boy Orphan

By **Allyn Draper**

CHAPTER I.

THE HALLOWE'EN PARTY.

"Oh, Della, I am so glad to see you! We have been waiting for you, wondering what could possibly detain you. What was the matter?"

The speaker, Edith Cross, better known among a number of the girls with whom she was not at all popular as "Cross Edith," smiled sweetly at pretty Della Cornell, the minister's only daughter, at the same time holding up her face as if expecting a kiss. But Miss Cornell very coolly gave her the tips of her fingers, for she knew that the black eyed Edith cherished no particular love for her, in spite of her sweet, honeyed words.

"I stopped on my way here to see Jane Stone, who is very ill," Della answered in her clear, ringing voice, "and——"

She got no further, for Edith interrupted her with a little shriek.

"Oh, Della, how could you go into that dreadful tumble-down hovel?" she cried, holding up both hands. "She may have some terrible disease that we are all likely to catch. I am so nervous about it, that I shall not get over it during the entire evening."

"I would not worry if I were in your place, Edith," Della replied, quietly. "There is not the slightest danger of you ever suffering from Jane's malady, for she has—brain fever!"

A suppressed titter went around among the boys and girls, for not one of them liked Edith Cross, while Della Cornell was beloved by rich and poor, young and old, high and low. The former's black eyes glittered with an angry light, but she managed to smile. Della was as quiet and serene as ever.

A manly youth, whose frank, pleasant face was indicative of his character, came forward to greet the new-comer, his gray eyes telling but too plainly what she was to him.

"We are all here now, save Dick," he said, holding her hand a trifle longer than was really necessary. "I wonder what is keeping him?"

"Oh, he was hanging around the barn the last I saw of him," a slender blonde youth drawled. "He had to finish his work

before he could come, and father had something extra for him to do to-night."

"Then why didn't you stay and help him so he would not keep us waiting?" Della Cornell asked somewhat sharply. "For you know we never begin anything unless Dick is here."

Walter Jones, for that was the name of the shallow looking boy who had spoken so slightly of the absent one, flushed hotly, but he said nothing. He was the only child of Nathan Jones, the richest farmer in that part of Vermont, and he had made up his mind long ago to win pretty Della Cornell, the minister's daughter, who was a general favorite in the small town of Burrville, a flourishing hamlet nestling in the midst of the green Vermont hills. Both father and son were thoroughly disliked, but money will speak for itself, and many a petty failing was overlooked on that account.

"I fail to see Miss White. Is she too detained?" Frank Spencer, the young man who had first addressed Della Cornell, remarked inquiringly, looking at Edith Cross. "It seems as if half the company had taken their departure when she and Dick are absent. She will be with us soon, I hope?"

Edith's face burned, but there was nothing for her to do but answer his question.

"She has not been feeling well for a few days, and mamma thought the excitement of to-night might prove too much for her, so she had her retire," she replied in a rather embarrassed tone of voice. "She believed a rest would do her more good."

"Nonsense," Della said briskly. "A jolly evening will do more to cheer her up and drive away the blues than a rest. Besides I want to see Hope. She is the dearest girl in all the world, and I suppose the poor child is lonesome."

"I see no reason why she should be lonesome," Edith remarked, stiffly. "I am sure she has a home good enough for any poor girl, in fact better than she has ever known before in all her life. She should feel deeply grateful to papa, but I am sorry to say that she does not appear to appreciate it."

"Perhaps she appreciates it more than she cares to tell," she said, slowly. "She is very quiet and reserved, you know, and then she has not been with you very long."

"Long enough to know the value of a good home," was the crisp retort.

"Time may make a change," and Della's bright eyes met the sullen black ones unflinchingly. "Ah, here is your mother now! Good-evening, Mrs. Cross, Edith was just telling me that Hope is not feeling well, and would not join us to-night, but I told her I thought she would feel better to come downstairs. With your permission, I will see her, and try to induce her to leave her room."

Mrs. Cross, a large portly woman, with a florid face, looked first at the speaker, then at her daughter, hardly knowing what to say. She did not like to offend Della, for she was under deep obligations to her father.

"She is not in her room," she said, uneasily. "I was obliged to send her into the village after something I had forgotten to order. She thought the walk would do her good."

A silence followed her words—a silence that would have been very embarrassing had she a more sensitive nature—but every eye was fastened upon her face as she stood there, and no wonder, for it was at least two miles into Burrville, a long way to send a young girl alone at night. The Cross residence, a magnificent place, was just far enough from the village to be pleasant.

Della was the first to speak.

"Then we shall have to wait until she returns, before we go on with our games," seating herself gracefully in a deep, easy chair, "for Hallowe'en would not be Hallowe'en unless Hope had a share in it. Edith, will you play a waltz to kill time until Hope comes?"

Outwardly smiling, but inwardly furious with rage, Edith took her place at the piano and played a brilliant waltz. A number of the young people kept time to the music, and it was a pretty sight to see the young people gliding over the floor in the long drawing room.

Della did not join them, but sat talking to Frank Spencer. She was fonder of Dr. Spencer's clever son than she cared to admit, and indeed he was a young man whom any girl would admire. He was as fond of his intimate friend and chum, Richard Barker, better known as "Dick I Will," as she was of pretty Hope White, the young orphan who made her home with Major Cross and his family. She was as good as she was fair, and it was well known among the boys and girls that Edith was jealous of the poor young dependent's beauty and grace.

"I am puzzling my brain as to what can keep Dick," the young man said to his companion. "He is always on time, and he promised to be here early to-night. I wanted him to meet Hope, you know, for they are sure to be great friends."

"How strange that she should have lived here for a year and never met him," Della remarked, smiling. "Yes, it is just a year ago this very night since she came on from New York. And from the moment I caught a glimpse of her sweet, tired face, I felt as if she were something near to me. I never met anyone I liked one half so well."

"Do you mean that?" reproachfully. "Well, never mind. Wait until we begin our games, and then we shall soon see. Sometimes, you know, people say a great many things they don't mean. And girls are noted for that. Boys always say just what they mean. I know I do. And I'll tell you something else if you wish to hear it. I'm a sort of prophet, you see. I'll wager you a box of gloves, that 'Dick I Will,' falls in love with Hope, and more than that—one year from to-night will find him at Burrville Academy, for he has made a vow to earn the money to pay for a full course, and when he says 'I Will,' rest assured he means it. He'll earn it honestly, too. I never knew another like him. That fellow will be a rich man, for he has a will of iron."

CHAPTER II.

THE FACE OF ONE WHO WAS DESTINED TO BE HER FATE.

While our hero's friend and the young girl he was so fond of, were awaiting his arrival in the luxurious drawing room of Major Cross, the boy himself was busy finishing his work about the premises of Farmer Jones, the selfish, hard-hearted man who grudgingly gave him a home for the labor he exacted of him. Although Nathan Jones was a very rich man, and his home was a large, comfortable farm-house, Dick's room was in the attic away up under the eaves, hot and stifling in the summer, cold and bleak in the winter. He had occupied those dreary quarters ever since he had come to the farm to live, and when he was a small boy, he used to think it the greatest treat in the world to get into Walter's dainty chamber for an hour. Yet when as small boys they attended the country school it was Dick who helped the stupid Walter through with his lessons. And Dick with his coarse, copper-toed shoes and faded clothes, was a greater favorite in those days the same as he was now, than Master Walter in his velvet suit and lace collar.

"It seems to me that there is always something extra for me to do whenever I want to go anywhere," he muttered, pitching the fragrant hay before the long line of eager cattle. "And if it were any other boy, he would give it up. But I will get through this work and be there in time for the games. Yes, yes, Princess Bonnie, I am coming," in answer to a low whinny of impatience. "Please don't break your manger all to pieces."

Throwing down his pitchfork, he walked over to the side of the big barn where the horses were stabled, and opened the small door before the manger. A black head with sharp, pointed ears, and great bright eyes was thrust out, the velvet nose poked lovingly against his arm, while the iron-shod hoofs pawed the floor of her stall.

"You beggar," the boy laughed, his handsome face glowing with pride. "You are making love to me because you want some oats! Oh, I know you, Princess Bonnie! You are like all the rest of your sex—sweet as sugar when you want anything. Well, you shall have your oats."

A generous measure of oats was poured into the mare's manger, and as he watched her for a few moments, he smiled.

"Wait until a year from now, my beauty, and then we shall see. You will be covered with glory, and I shall be the proudest fellow in the country. We will win, my pet, for we will never give up the fight. Farmer Jones did not dream what he was doing when he gave you to me, a little puny, weak colt. He would not bother with you, for he thought you would surely die. But we know what we are doing."

Half an hour later, his labors finished, dressed in his best clothes, and they were plain enough, he was on his way to the scene of the Hallowe'en party, a distance of nearly four miles, for the village of Burrville was situated between the two farms, one lying on either side. He did not mind that, however, for he was a fast walker, and he covered the ground rapidly.

At the foot of a long, steep hill ran the railroad, and a dangerous place it was, too, for a runaway horse coming down that hill was sure to meet with death. It would take a giant's arm to stop a maddened animal in time to save it from an awful fate.

It was strange that such thoughts should enter Dick's head as he crossed the track and started to climb the hill, and he could never account for it. But we cannot account for a great many things in this world. It is mystery upon mystery.

Suddenly a pair of horses coming at a terrible pace appeared before him, and at the very moment the shrill, sharp whistle of the last passenger train that stopped at Burrville, sounded upon the chill night air. A thrill of terror struck through the boy's heart, for how could he alone stop those two maddened, fiercely plunging beasts? It was impossible.

Nearer and nearer they came. Louder and louder grew the rumble of the approaching train. And then Dick caught sight of a white, horrified face from which every spark of life or hope seemed to have fled.

That settled it. His mind was made up, and taking his stand in the middle of the road, he set his teeth tightly together.

"I will stop them if I lose my life in the attempt!" he vowed, and although his heart beat so loudly that he could hear its every throb, not for a single instant did he waver from his purpose.

Our hero was an honest, God-fearing boy, and a silent prayer went up to heaven—a prayer that his strength would not fail him in the hour of need.

They were almost upon him now, those mad beasts with glaring eyes and fiery nostrils, yet he never flinched. His arms were like iron, so tense were the muscles, and his face was ghastly.

By the bright moonlight he saw that the occupant of the carriage was a man of middle age, with snow white mustache. The reins were hanging loose over the dashboard, for he was hopeless from fright.

Another second and they would be upon him. But he was ready for them, and with one mighty bound he was at their heads, his nerves and muscles like iron. His strong hands clutched their bridles, and it seemed as if all the strength in his body was concentrated in his hands and arms.

There was a struggle, short, brief yet terrific, between man and beast—a determined battle between human strength and brute strength, but the former conquered, and trembling in every nerve, the horses crouched back upon their haunches, cowed, awed, subdued by the youth, who looked fearlessly into their eyes.

A moment later he gave the reins into the driver's hands.

"You need have no fear of their running away again, sir," he said, politely. "They are quiet enough now."

"By Heaven, boy! but you are the bravest hero I ever knew of!" the stranger exclaimed, looking admiringly at the young man. "How can I ever repay you for what you have done this night?"

Our hero was as proud as he was brave, and he drew back haughtily.

"I want no pay, sir," he said, coldly. "I am amply paid by knowing that I have saved your life."

"But, my boy, I cannot let it go in this manner. I want——"

He was talking in the air, for Dick had disappeared. His tall, athletic figure was vanishing swiftly up the hill. He knew the man he had rescued was safe, and he waited no longer.

"It seems that I am doomed to be insulted for everything I do," he said to himself. "If I save a life, I am asked how much I want for it. Other boys are not treated in that way. But in spite of them all, in spite of the fact that old Farmer Jones took me from the Orphan's Home, I will yet rise above them all, I will compel them to treat me with respect."

As I have said before, our hero was proud, almost too proud for his station in life so many would say, but I do not agree with them. He was poor, to be sure, but he was one of nature's noblemen.

He was destined to meet with another adventure ere he reached his destination. Passing through a small grove in

whose quiet depths a silver stream rippled, he was attracted by what he supposed was something bright and golden, but a second glance revealed the truth to him. It was the shining yellow of a young girl's head, and the silver moonbeams touched it to a living, burning gold.

It was Hope, our dainty heroine, and on her way to Burrville she had paused to kneel down beside the murmuring waters, more in a spirit of curiosity than anything else. Her heart was heavy, for her life had been so empty, so lonely that she felt keenly the position she held in the Cross household. Little did he dream that to-night life would change for her, that through the dark clouds of sorrow, the golden sunshine of pure joy would shine.

Suddenly she started. Mirrored in the depths of the stream the young girl beheld a handsome, boyish face—the face of one who was destined to be her fate.

CHAPTER III.

BRAVE DICK "I WILL."

Dick had stolen upon her and looked over her shoulder, thus she beheld his face in the shimmering, moon-filtered waters. Her heart gave a great leap, then seemed to stand still in a new and sudden terror, for it suddenly dawned upon her that she was alone in the grove, and the face she saw was that of a stranger, a flesh and blood mortal, not a mere vision as she had at first imagined.

Her beautiful face was covered with blushes, and she was deeply embarrassed as she sprang to her feet and faced him.

He spoke first, yet he felt his heart throbbing faster than usual.

"I beg you pardon," he said, with a low bow. "I did not mean to interrupt you, but when I saw your hair glistening in the moonlight, I was puzzled as to what it might be, for I could not see your face, you know, and your hair looked like spun gold."

It was a pretty compliment, but he paid it in such a frank, manly way, that she knew he was not flattering her. Neither did he intend it as such, for he could not help admiring the lovely face and golden hair, the brightest he had ever seen.

"I suppose you think I am very foolish," she murmured shyly, her eyes hidden by the snowy silken fringed lids. "But you know it is Hallowe'en, and in a sudden spirit of fun I knelt beside the brook, for they say——"

"That the maiden sees the face of the one who is destined to be her fate," he interrupted gently, noticing her embarrassment and kindly coming to her aid. "Ah, what a fortunate chap I am. But speaking of Hallowe'en, that reminds me that I am on my way to a Hallowe'en party. I must say, however, that I would prefer to remain here."

"It is at the home of Major Cross," he went on, "and since we have met in this strange, romantic way, don't you think we ought to know each other's names? Now you may be a fairy princess, a wood nymph in disguise, for all I know, but my name is plain Richard Barker, better known as Dick 'I Will,' because I am such a stubborn wretch, who——"

"So you are Dick 'I Will,' and I meet you for the first time?" she exclaimed in open delight. "I have heard of you for nearly a year, and I have always wanted to know you, but it happened that I never had the opportunity. I live with Major Cross, you know. My name is Hope White."

"Hope White!" he echoed, in surprise. "Why, my dear old

friend, Frank Spencer, is always talking about you and singing your praises. Are you a relative of Major Cross?"

"No; I—I am given a home for my services about the house, and act as Edith's maid," she answered, a hot flush staining even her brow, while her voice trembled. "I have no parents, no friends, no home, and—and they are very kind indeed."

Dick's heart grew very tender toward this beautiful girl who was so utterly alone in the world, and impulsively he held out his hand.

"I, too, am alone in the world," he said, softly. "I am given a home with Farmer Jones for my work on and about the farm. The old saying that misery loves company, seems to be true, for we are both in the same position. But let us hope that better days will come, and soon, too. Were you on your way home?"

She shook her golden head.

"No, I am going to Burrville on an errand for Mrs. Cross," she replied, touched by his gentleness. "She discovered at the last moment that she had no vanilla in the house, and she always uses it to season her ice cream."

"It seems to me that she might have sent one of the farm hands, or at least taken out a horse," he said, dryly. "It is rather an unusual thing to send a young girl alone at night. But I shall accompany you to the village."

"I fear they would not like it at home," and she clasped her hands together nervously. "I do not mind going alone, indeed I do not!"

"Nevertheless, I am going with you," was his cool answer. "I should not care to have a sister of mine out alone in these woods at night. We shall be back in time for the games."

She said no more, and to tell the truth she was glad of his company. They laughed and chatted merrily as they walked along in the soft, October moonlight, so by the time they reached Burrville, they felt like old-time friends.

Edith Cross would have been wild had she known that the young girl she hated was with handsome Dick "I Will." He was poor, but she was determined to win him, firmly believing that some day he would be both rich and famous. In fact, there were many who predicted a brilliant future for the boy, who worked simply for his board and clothes on Farmer Jones' farm.

Although our hero and pretty Hope became the best of friends on that mellow October night, they did not dream how their lives were to be drawn together. And they were both happier by far than they had ever been before, why they could not say, yet it seemed to them that a goodly portion of the clouds and shadows that had been their portion during their brief careers, had been swept away.

The vanilla Mrs. Cross had been so much in need of at the last moment, was purchased, and they started homeward. Strange to relate, the distance between the village store, and Major Cross' home, appeared to have lengthened, for it required about twice the usual time to walk it. But I need not tell you why, boys, for we have all been through the same thing, everyone of us, and we would not have missed it for all the wealth the world contains. Yet we would give many a long weary day of later years to go back and live it over again. But here, I am growing sentimental, and I must not forget my readers by allowing my own memories of Hallowe'en to interfere.

It was amusing to see Edith Cross when the youthful couple walked into the house half an hour later. Her black eyes flashed, but she smiled sweetly as she gave Dick her hand.

"We were beginning to give you up, Dick," she said pleasantly. "What detained you?"

"I met Miss White on her way to the village, and I walked back with her," he answered politely. "It was rather late

for her to be out alone, and she was kind enough to allow me to accompany her. I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but I know you will forgive me this time."

"I will forgive you this once, Dick," and she pressed his hand slightly. "Hope," turning to the young girl, "mamma would like the vanilla now."

"You surely would not deprive us of the pleasure of your society, Miss White," Dick called after the fair girl as she started to leave the room. "We shall not begin our games until you return."

"No, indeed, we could not get through the evening without you, Hope," Della chimed in. "So hurry back like a dear good girl."

Edith was beaten, and she had to submit gracefully, for she saw the smiles upon the faces of several, and she did not want to be the laughing stock of her guests. In a few moments Hope returned, and the fun and frolic began.

My dear young readers, I will not weary you by a description of the games of Hallowe'en, for really all of them are known to you. But the greatest interest was entered in the big silver basket of great red-cheeked apples, that were brought in later in the evening. And a great shout went up from the boys and girls, when pretty Hope carefully pared one of the juicy beauties, throwing the long, ribbon-like strand over her shoulder, for the letters formed by the bright red apple peeling, were the initials of the hero of the evening—brave Dick "I Will."

CHAPTER IV.

ALONE, AND CAST UPON THE WORLD.

There upon the floor, plain, crimson, glowing, lay the three letters, D. I. W. And the young man for whose name they stood, felt his heart throb faster. Boy though he was, he felt from the moment his eyes rested upon the sweet, flower-like face of Hope White, that fate had intended them for each other.

"Your initials, Dick," Della Cornell cried gleefully, clapping her hands as she spoke. "See how gracefully the letters are curved. Did you ever know of such a strange thing? They are not R. B. standing for Richard Barker, but just plain D. I. W. And that is the name by which you are best known. Now, don't tell me that there isn't something strange and mystic about Hallowe'en, for I know better, and then the apple peelings tell this story."

Dick laughed gayly, yet his cheeks burned, and the merry, light-hearted girl was keen enough to see it all. She saw that he was deeply interested in her favorite friend, and she was glad of it, for while she was not of a spiteful nature, yet she was delighted that Edith Cross should be made to suffer. For she was weary of her airs and graces. An honest, true child of nature herself, she could not tolerate deceit and treachery in others. She might be a bit hasty, but her heart was pure gold.

"Since you take such an interest in Hallowe'en sports and games, Miss Della, suppose you try and see what a simple little apple peeling will do for you," our hero retorted. "Here is the largest, finest apple in the basket," handing her one of the juicy, red-cheeked beauties.

"And we will possess our souls in peace while you make preparations. Ah, you hesitate. Surely, you are not afraid that Cupid will outdo you?"

His laughing, half-mocking words amused her pride. She threw her head back proudly while her bright eyes flashed:

"No, Master Dick 'I Will,' I am not afraid of Cupid, as you are pleased to put it. In fact, I am not afraid of anyone or anything. But you need not think to have the laugh on me. I am peeling your apple, and I can tell you very easily what the letters stand for if you wish to know, shall I?"

"I shall be delighted to know in advance," he answered with a low bow.

"It is quite likely the letters formed by this apple peeling will be N. G.," and she shrugged her shoulders as she spoke. "I know they will."

A merry laugh greeted her, and she bit her under lip, for pretty Della did not like the laugh at her expense. By this time she had finished peeling the apple, and with her bright eyes meeting Dick's defiantly, she tossed the long red satiny strip over her shoulder.

An instant later and the big room with its old-fashioned fireplace resounded to the merry shouts of laughter coming from the throats of every boy and girl present, for the letters lying in bold relief against the background of the velvet carpet were F. S.

The spirited girl, although she was embarrassed, had too much sense to allow any of her thoughtless companions to see it. She joined in the laugh with them, thus one half of the pleasure at her expense was lost.

"Well, Frank, it seems that you are my fate," she said, gayly, yet not one among that thoughtless throng dreamed of the tempest raging in her breast. "And on Hallowe'en everything is supposed to be true. I hope you believe in the new woman."

Frank Spencer's clear, honest eyes met hers, and a pang of keen disappointment pierced his manly breast. He was not able to understand this girl, of whose heart he had been sure two hours ago. One moment she was tender, gentle, confiding. The next, and her merry, scornful laughter would fill the air with its silvery echoes.

"Yes, I believe in the new woman, providing she is like you," he answered, and something in his earnest glance caused her heart to thrill. "For if she is so charming a creature, who would not believe in her?"

Before she had time to answer him supper was announced, and nothing more was said regarding the letter. Edith Cross hoped that our hero would offer to escort her to the dining room, but he did not, and she was furious when she saw him give his arm to Hope, with a bow that would have done credit to a Chesterfield. I need not add that Frank Spencer was Della's escort.

The long table in the big dining room fairly groaned under the weight of good things with which it was spread. It was an evening never to be forgotten, and there were at least four happy young people who remembered it as long as they lived. So did Edith Cross, for it was the death of her fond dreams. In spite of her selfishness she had a heart, and she had given it unasked, unsought, to handsome Dick "I Will." But he thought only of Hope, the golden haired girl, whose face he beheld that night for the first time.

My dear young readers, I will not weary you by giving the details of that Hallowe'en party. Suffice to say that it was a success, and everyone present enjoyed it hugely. All save the youthful hostess, and her heart was full of envy and bitter jealousy to think of enjoying anything. If wishes could have killed dainty Hope, she would never have lived to enjoy that brief hour at the garden gate with the boy whom she realized was her fate. The apple peelings had told her so, and now she knew it.

"Good-night, Hope, for you will let me call you Hope, I know," he whispered, holding her hand, while the soft mellow October moonlight bathed her beautiful face and golden head in a flood of glory. "I shall see you again, for we are going to

be the best of friends. And better days are in store for us both. I know it, I feel it. Fate surely sent me across your pathway to-night."

She looked up into his handsome face, her eyes shining through her tears.

"And I am glad, too," she answered, tremulously. "For I have so few friends, indeed I have none, save noble Della Cornell. Oh, she is the dearest, truest friend in all the wide world, and were it not for her I should be desolate. Ah, how sad a thing it is to be alone and lonely! But you are better able to understand it, for you, too, have lived among strangers, knowing naught of a home or love."

"But now I know the latter," was his fervent reply. "And I shall never be lonely again."

Hope was about to speak, when the sharp, disagreeable voice of Mrs. Cross sounded upon her ear.

"Hope, Hope White, come into the house this instant!" she called out. "Whatever do you mean by staying out in the cold night dampness and at this late hour? Come right in!"

With a hasty good-night to our hero, the young girl obeyed the call, knowing full well that she would have a very unpleasant interview when Mrs. Cross met her.

And she was right. No sooner had the hall door closed behind her, than that lady said furiously:

"You bad, wicked girl you, how dare you disgrace yourself while you are in my house, and openly insult my daughter? I want you to leave the shelter of my roof at once, do you hear? You shall not sleep here another night. Sleep in the fields, if you like, it matters but little to me. In the morning you may come back and get your few miserable rags. Here, throw this about your shoulders," tossing her a thin, worn shawl. "But go, go, go! You shall not breathe the same air with my pure Edith. Oh, how I hate you!"

Thus poor Hope was rudely thrust out into the night without a dollar in her pocket, or even warm clothing to protect her from the chill autumn night. She was utterly dazed. Her brain was numb, yet she remembered one thing, one bitter, awful truth—she was alone, and cast upon the world.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW FRIEND.

Edith Cross, treacherous, jealous, spiteful, had watched Dick all the evening, and it maddened her to see how devoted he was to Hope. At last she could not control herself, thus her tale of woe was poured into her mother's ears.

Mrs. Cross was like her daughter. In fact, the child inherited the mother's nature, therefore it was not strange that they should agree in everything.

Mrs. Cross stood like a statue, her eyes blazing, as those last cruel words left her lips. Her lips were white, and she would have liked nothing better than to have given the beautiful, helpless girl a heavy blow.

The echo of the heavy hall door rang through the house, causing the chandeliers to tremble, and then, as the faint sounds died away, the heartless woman, who had turned a young girl adrift upon the cold world to suffer alone, unaided, listened, but heard no sorrowful voice pleading for admittance to the home which had been so grudgingly given her, she said to her daughter, in her hard, cold voice:

"Go upstairs to your room, Edith. She will not trouble us again. In the morning if she comes back after her clothes, she shall have them, but I would not allow her to sleep be-

neath my roof again for a single hour. Of all the ungrateful creatures that I ever saw, she is certainly the worst."

"She will never have a chance to meet Richard Barker again while she is under my roof," Edith ground out between her set teeth. "The impudent ungrateful thing. I feel like boxing her ears whenever I think of her. And he acted like a fool over her just because she happens to have a wax doll face and silly blue eyes. I thought he had more sense than that."

"And I thought you had more sense than to fall in love with a beggar," her mother chimed in, her sharp voice sounding sharper and more disagreeable than ever. "For Richard Barker is nothing but a beggar in spite of his handsome face. And the airs and graces that he uses. It is really enough to make anyone sick. For my part, I fail to see anything wonderful in him. He is not my style at all. I can tell you that when I was a girl, it took something beside a handsome face and an empty pocket to catch me."

"Well, I don't see that you did such a wonderful thing after all," mamma's very dutiful daughter answered, with a shrug of her plump shoulders. "For papa is just about as poor as they make 'em at present, and——"

"Edith!" Mrs. Cross interrupted, her voice trembling with anger. "Edith, how dare you? Do you forget you are addressing your mother?"

"No, mamma, I could not forget that," very calmly. "And you know very well that I am only telling the truth, for papa is poor at present. I know he is heavily in debt, and but for that stupid old minister, Joseph Cornell, we should be homeless. To be sure he holds a mortgage on the place, but thank goodness he don't know enough to foreclose it. If he did we should have been homeless long ago. As it is, his stupidity is our salvation. And that is why I am so sweet and agreeable to that hateful Della, when I hate her, the mean, saucy little cat. I would like to box her ears and tell her just what I think of her, but I dare not."

"No, it would not be well for you," her mother said, with a smile, "for it might result in your having to work for your living—a very unpleasant future for one as indolent as you are, my dear."

"I am not indolent, but I see no reason why I should work the same as other common people do," Edith answered, sulkily. "It is only the very vulgar who work. Ladies do not degrade themselves so."

Mrs. Cross winced and her heavy face flushed. She had been cook in a wealthy brewer's family when Major Cross found and married her, and that one subject was always a very tender one with her. She did not care to have it mentioned, but her daughter was not the most considerate person in all the world.

"Some of our cleverest men and women have at some time in their lives been obliged to work for a living," she said, severely. "That is one of your faults, Edith—always speaking slightly of those who are poor and lowly."

Edith laughed outright.

"I wonder who taught me to speak in that way, mamma!" very coolly. "I believe I remember hearing you say the self-same thing, and now you blame me for echoing the very sentiments you impressed upon my mind."

"You may go to your room, Edith, and remain there until you learn to address me in a more respectful tone," and Mrs. Cross walked slowly across the floor in what she considered her queenliest manner. "I am more than surprised at you."

The young lady did not answer her save by a shrug of the shoulder, but tossing her head, retired to her dainty chamber.

And while she nestled warmly beneath the soft, silken coverlet, dreaming of the young man who never gave her even one solitary thought, poor Hope stood alone in the chill

autumn night, her heart sore and bruised, her red lips quivering, while the great hot tears rolled down her cheeks like pearls. She was dazed by the sudden shock. She could not as yet hardly realize it.

Homeless and friendless! Those two words rang in her ears like a knell. She did not have a roof to shelter her from the night, not a dollar in her pocket with which to purchase one. Her only protection from the frost and cold was the thin shawl that Mrs. Cross had thrown to her. And that was poor, indeed, for it was worn and old.

"Heaven pity me!" she sobbed. "I have done no wrong, and yet I am turned adrift upon the world because they do not like me. Where shall I go, oh, where shall I go?"

In her sorrow and terror she had forgotten all about her kind friend Della. She suddenly thought of her, and a ray of hope entered her breast.

"Della will give me a home, oh, I know she will!" she murmured, and drawing the folds of the worn shawl closer about her, she started briskly toward the village. "Ah, how thankful I am to have such a friend in the hour of need."

She had taken but a few steps when the sharp clatter of iron-shod hoofs, finally accompanied by the roll of wheels, struck upon her ear. At first she was somewhat startled, and she looked about her, wondering where she could conceal herself until the vehicle had passed. But there was no place near enough for her to reach, so she walked on, although her heart throbbed fiercely.

The horse was close behind her now, and the driver drew rein. It was something unusual to see a young girl alone on the public's highway at that late hour.

"Do you know that it is very dangerous for such a young girl as you are to be out alone to-night," a man's musical voice asked kindly. "I should dislike very much to see a daughter of mine out so late. If you will tell me where you are bound, I will take you safely to your destination. Do not be afraid to trust me, for I live near here. My name is Richard Cadwell, and I live at the Pines."

Hope started. So this was the rich stranger who had purchased the magnificent old place on the hill just out of Burrville. She had heard many stories of his vast wealth, but she had never seen him until now. She stole a look at his sad, handsome face and felt that she could trust him, for there was nobility stamped upon every feature, in every line.

"You are very kind," she answered, timidly. "And I will accept your offer. I am going to the Rev. Joseph Cornell's. My name is Hope White, and I lived at—at Major Cross' until to-night. Now, I—I have no home, sir, if they do not wish me to stay at the clergyman's house."

He looked at her keenly as he helped her into the light buggy beside him, and he understood the situation at once, for he knew the pretty golden-haired child, as he called her, had been very unhappy in the home of Major Cross.

CHAPTER VI.

A GENEROUS OFFER—AN UNKIND REFUSAL.

He was silent for an instant, his straight brows meeting in a line, then he said, briefly:

"Yes, I have heard of Major Cross, in fact I know him quite well. So you have left his home? Tell me why, my child. Did you feel in the way there? Were you not happy?"

Hope swallowed the big lump in her throat before she could answer him.

"They did not wish me to remain longer," she answered, bravely, trying to shield the woman who was so unkind to her. "I—I do not think they liked too large a family, and I made one too many."

Loyal little Hope! She would not even betray the one who had treated her unkindly, unjustly. And Richard Cadwell could read her heart and thoughts like an open book.

He said nothing, however, and in a short time they reached the home of the minister who was so well liked by the people of Burrville. They had retired, but it did not take long to awaken them.

"You poor child, of course you shall come here," Della exclaimed when Hope meekly asked her for shelter. "Come right in. I thought there would be trouble there to-night. I saw it brewing, and I half expected something like this, but I hardly thought she would go so far as to turn you out into the night. I always knew she was hard-hearted, but this beats me."

The minister himself welcomed her, and Richard Cadwell drove away well satisfied with Hope's friends and her new home. Before going, he said to them:

"I am glad to see this young lady in such good hands. I will drive over and see her to-morrow. Good-night, and Heaven bless you all."

Della would not let Hope talk any that night, and an hour later she was soundly sleeping in her own comfortable room, all troubles forgotten, dreaming of handsome Dick "I Will."

Now to return to our hero. He too was in a happy frame of mind when he reached home after the Hallowe'en party. He forgot that he was bound out to Farmer Jones until he was twenty-one—forgot that he was penniless, homeless, without a dollar to his name, for he felt rich and proud as a king. The way to success and riches seemed open before him, and so easy, so pleasant to traverse.

"I cannot possibly fail after to-night," he said, triumphantly. "I will win now, for I have an object in view—something to look forward to. Before, I had nothing. But won't Master Walker be sulky for the next week, though! And Edith! They will be justified in calling her Cross Edith from now on. I am sorry, though, for that beautiful girl. She looks so fair, so sweet, so gentle—neither strong enough nor fitted to battle with the world."

He slept soundly that night, and his dreams were very pleasant ones. He was up bright and early the next morning, busily at work as usual, when in the barn the farmer appeared, his face heavy and sullen.

"Walter told me last night, after he got home, that you acted like a fool," was his first greeting, "and I thought 'twas a foolish thing for you to go to such a place, when you ain't used to high-toned society. You know you're only a bound boy, and that makes a pile of difference."

Dick's face flushed hotly, and he bit his under lip. The tone in which the words were spoken, was worse than the words. They cut like the sharp thrust of a knife.

"You are right," he said, very slowly and distinctly, his clear eyes meeting the shifting gray ones of the farmer. "You are right. I am only a bound boy, that is true, and I am not used to good society, for where have I ever been to meet people of refinement? My life has been spent on this farm, my days in toiling faithfully for you."

Farmer Jones gasped.

"You—you sassy young rascal, do you dare talk back to me?" he managed to say, wondering if he had made a mistake, for never before since he had lived with him, had Dick made such remarks. He was getting too independent. He must "take him down a peg," as he expressed it.

"Look here, young man," he said, gruffly. "If you don't keep a civil tongue in your head, I'll give you a taste of the strap. You ain't too old yet for it, and you're in my hands for two years yet. I'll learn you some manners before long."

Dick threw down the pitchfork he was handling, and folding his arms across his breast, looked calmly back at him.

"One word if you please, before I do another stroke of work," he said, quietly, but with a meaning the other understood perfectly well. "I am doing the work of a man; saving you a man's wages, simply for what I eat and the roof that shelters me. I am not a child. I fill a man's place, and I insist upon being treated with proper respect. You will never lay one hand on me, for I tell you plainly that I will not submit to such an outrage. Let me alone, and for the next two years I will work as faithfully as I have worked in the past. But do not attempt to force me to do anything."

Muttering to himself the farmer turned away, and Dick, picking up his fork once more, resumed his work. But he was left in peace after that.

It was that very afternoon that Farmer Jones was surprised to receive a visit from the rich owner of The Pines. He had seen him before, but had never spoken with him, therefore he felt quite honored at being noticed by so distinguished a man.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Jones," he said, kindly. "I have often seen you in the village, and have admired your farm in passing by. It shows that a careful hand is at the helm."

"Well, yes, it does look pretty fair, that's a fact," the farmer answered, proudly. "It shows that I don't have any lazy sticks on my place, but I've got to keep right behind 'em all the time."

"Of course, of course," was the hearty reply. "But we all have to do that. Now, I called here to-day to make you an offer. You have in your employ, a boy by the name of Richard Barker, have you not?"

"Yes, he's bound out to me," was the reply given with tightly pursed-up lips.

"I like him, and I would be glad to pay you for his time during the next two years," Richard Cadwell continued pleasantly. "For the money you would be able to employ a strong man who would do more work, and I will send the boy to a good school for a number of years. When he is done, he will be ready to make his way in the world, and who knows but what he may win fame and fortune! Name your price, and the money is yours."

Nathan Jones shook his head. His eyes glittered greedily, for he dearly loved money, but he would not yield.

"No, sir," he said. "Keep your money, and I'll keep Dick. Go to school indeed! The best school for him is in the stables, where he belongs."

CHAPTER VII.

BE BRAVE; BE PATIENT.

Richard Cadwell stared at the farmer, for never in all his life had he heard such a disagreeable voice, nor witnessed such a light of narrow, petty meanness as the one that shone in eyes of Nathan Jones.

"Why, I thought you would surely be glad to give the boy a chance," he said in a puzzled tone. "There is a remarkable future before him if he is given a chance; he will make a brilliant career for himself. I tell you that I have a great admiration for him, and I would do almost anything to help

him along. I feel as much interested in him as though he were my own son."

"Well, he'll have to make his future and his career for himself, and he'll have to start it out here in the barn, for that's about all the school he'll see for the next two years," the farmer chuckled. "He's a mighty good worker, Dick is. I never knew him to shirk, only he's got too big ideas for a bound boy. No, I ain't going to let him go. I need him, and my son says he can curry a horse fit to beat the band. He'll outgrow all his notions of college in time, and settle down into a good farmer. Book learning is a curse to boys nowadays. Why, sir, when I was a boy, all we expected to know was to read, write and cipher. And I guess what's good enough for me, is good enough for a boy who don't know who his folks were."

Dick, who had overheard the conversation, felt his face burn hotly, and he knew the stranger was looking at him kindly, pityingly. If there was anything in the world that our hero disliked, it was to be pitied. He could not bear to even think of it.

"I see no reason why he should not become a prominent man, no matter who his parents are," Richard Cadwell said finally, unable to hide the ring of indignation in his voice. "He is not to blame, whoever they are. But this I will say—that boy comes from good old stock, for he shows it in his face. And I am inclined to think that you will regret it if you refuse my offer."

Nathan Jones shook his head stubbornly.

"No, I never regret anything," and he showed his long, yellow teeth in a grin. "And right here on this farm he's got to stay until I'm ready to let him go. College indeed! He learned enough at the district school."

"And yet you send your boy away to school!" Richard Cadwell broke in, unable to conceal his disgust at the petty nature of the other. "You believe in giving him every chance to improve and make a career for himself. Strange then that you should feel so toward this young man."

Nathan Jones bristled up like an angry gobbler, while his pale, gray eyes snapped.

"There's a mighty difference between my son and the bound boy," he snapped. "You forget, sir, that my son is a gentleman! And as such, he must have a fitting education, for he will be a great man, a great man, sir."

Richard Cadwell bit his lips, an amused look creeping into his fine dark eyes, while Dick turned his back to hide his broad smile. The mere idea of Walter Jones ever making a great man, was simply amusing. He was not even clever in one particular line. At school he was always behind in his lessons, the most stupid boy in his class, and but for Dick many a fine trouncing would he have received.

"Well, Mr. Jones, we will not argue upon the question," and the dark eyes good-naturedly met the farmer's gray ones. "My only object now, is to see if I cannot win you over regarding this boy. I will even double the amount, and I will see that he either has a profession, or if he prefers business, I will start him in business, whatever he may fancy. First of all, however, he must have an education."

"I tell you that you are only wasting time," the farmer said doggedly, growing more stubborn and set every moment. "He belongs to this farm, and here he's going to stay for the next two years. Now, there ain't one bit of use in arguing with me, for I never give in."

Richard Cadwell by this time lost his temper, and with eyes flashing, said sternly:

"Very well, Nathan Jones, have your own way, but mark my words, it will all come back to you, and you will wish you had listened to me. For some reason you dislike this boy, and you are determined to keep him from making a name

for himself and a career. I do not understand your motive, but I know it is not a good one. Of course, you have the right to control him two years longer, and I cannot interfere. Rest assured of one thing, however, if it lay in my power, I would do so very quickly. But two years will soon pass away, and then we shall see."

"You don't know what may happen in two years," the farmer retorted. "And I don't care very much, for my part. I've got all I can attend to in looking after my own business. If other people did the same they would get along better and have no trouble."

His manner was so insolent that it fired Dick's blood. He managed to control himself for a moment, then he could do so no longer.

"See here, Nathan Jones," he said, in a clear firm voice, turning upon the farmer. "You have had your say, now I will have mine. I shall remain here two years longer, for during that period I belong to you. After that we are strangers. While I am in your employ, I shall work faithfully. I shall not grumble, but I shall yet cause you to open your eyes in wonder. I will make a name, a place in the world for myself. Two years is not so very much to lose out of a life, yet it is more than I care to lose. What can't be cured, though, must be endured."

"I have a good mind to give you a taste of that strap, boy," the farmer muttered, glaring at the youth who dared speak his mind plainly. "And for two cents I'd do it, too!"

"Better not, Mr. Jones," was the quiet answer. "I would not try it if I were you. I have got to be a trifle too large for that sort of thing, don't you know?"

Richard Cadwell spoke to Dick then, holding out one hand.

"Well, my boy, I am sorry that my plans failed, but let us hope for the best, and two years is not a lifetime. After they have passed away we shall do something, and you must be brave and keep up a stout heart during those years. We are not the only ones who have to wait. Be brave, be patient!"

"I will!" Dick answered promptly. "I will!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRAND HUNT OF THE YEAR.

Nathan Jones had nothing to say after Richard Cadwell had taken his departure. Dick was greatly surprised, for he had expected to get a severe lecture, but he was agreeably disappointed.

"How can a man be so mean?" the boy asked himself again and again during that day. "He is not keeping me here because he likes me or appreciates my work, but it is out of pure meanness and spite. Well, I would rather be in my shoes than in theirs, for they must hate themselves at times. I can stand it, and I will conquer them!"

Walter said nothing to him either, but he knew from the grin upon his face and the leer in his eyes that his father had told him all. Our hero never let on that he noticed it, keeping steadily at his work as if nothing had happened. He set his teeth, firmly resolving not to let them cause him to lose his patience.

And they both soon saw that they would gain nothing by the course they had at first mapped out to follow, so wisely held their peace.

Day after day passed on, nothing unusual happening to disturb their tranquil calm, and at last came a holiday that was

greeted with joyful eagerness, not only by the boys of the neighborhood, but the men as well were pleased. It was the grand hunt that took place every year. To be sure the game was small, nearly all squirrels and a few stray rabbits or birds, and once in a great while a fox was scared from cover. But so far no one had ever seen a deer in the woods about Burrville.

This year, however, there was great excitement. A very large, red deer had been seen several times in and about the big wood near Burrville. More than one person had seen it, too, so it was no idle tale.

It was the custom after the hunt to have a supper at the home of one of the hunters, followed by a dance at which all the sweethearts, wives and sisters were present. And while the game brought in did not amount to much, it gave them a long day's sport and an evening of enjoyment. The one who could show the biggest lot of squirrels' tails, received a medal as a token of his marksmanship.

The eventful day dawned, cold, sharp, frosty, just the kind of weather for a tramp through the woods or a run over the hills. They were to meet at Nathan Jones' house early in the morning, and start from there. In the evening there would be the supper and the dance.

There was not a single man in the party who really liked the farmer, but he had money, and a certain amount of influence. And this year it was his turn to entertain the hunters.

The rosy sunshine of the bracing autumn morn was just beginning to peep through a mist of clouds, when amidst much laughter and many jokes, the party started off over the hills in search of their day's sport. And in the old farm house there was a delightful fragrance, revealing the fact that when the hunters returned, hungry and tired, they would not be greeted by an empty table.

Dick was with the party, of course, and so was Robert. The farmer had intended leaving our hero at home to superintend the work on the farm, and he had his own reasons for not wishing our hero to be one of the hunting party. He was a crack shot, and the honors of the day would be showered upon him.

Frank Spencer made such a violent protest, however, that Nathan Jones had to yield, and smothering his wrath he told the boy to get ready.

"I believe that infernal old skinflint intended to keep you at home purposely, Dick," he said, in confidence to the boy. "Confound his ugly mug, anyway, I never in all my life saw such a man! The only thing I am sorry about is, that we will have to have the supper and the dance in his house. It casts a shadow over the whole evening."

"Never mind, Frank, he's got a couple of women there to-day who can make an oyster stew that will make your mouth water, and as for pumpkin pies and tarts—don't say a word."

"That settles it then, Dick," and the doctor's son smacked his lips and laughed. "And I'll soon settle the good things once I am at his table. Wait until you see the expression upon his face when I finish enough for six men."

For Farmer Jones was very mean and stingy regarding his table. His motto was, eat just enough to live, not live and enjoy the good cheer of a luxurious, well appointed table. And who knew it better than Dick, whose fare had always been of the plainest, coarsest kind. To be sure, there was plenty of rare and delicate food purchased, but it was for Walter who was not really very strong, so his father said. Therefore he must have an extra breakfast prepared for him every morning.

The hunt was a grand success. Never before had the woods seemed to be so full of both red and gray squirrels, with now and then a stray black beauty. There were quite a

number of rabbits, too, and a few lucky marksmen shot some quail.

Dick's gamebag was half full before some of the others brought down a single thing. Always an expert with rifle or revolver, to-day he appeared to be charmed, and sent mystic bullets speeding through the air.

At noon they halted, and building a huge fire, had their lunch. Then they were off again, each one eager to win the coveted medal.

The short November day was drawing to a close as they were returning from the hunt. The windows of the Jones farm house, all aglow, was the first welcome sight that greeted them, and they hastened their footsteps, knowing full well what awaited them.

Ten minutes later, they were gathered in the huge old dining room, which was very seldom indeed the scene of such merrymaking, and by the way the oyster stew and fried chicken disappeared, quickly followed by pumpkin pies and tarts, great sugar dipped doughnuts and sparkling cider, one would declare they had not eaten for a week.

After supper would come the counting of the bushy tails in the different gamebags, the presentation of the medal, and then, last of all, the dance. The girls could hardly control their impatience, so eager were they for the first waltz, and it was with a sigh of relief that they viewed the men arise from the table.

CHAPTER IX.

A WICKED SCHEME EXPOSED.

Shouts of laughter filled the air as the contents of the different gamebags were emptied, for it told the skill of some of the farmers as marksmen. One man's bag, who always boasted that he never missed a shot in his life, was found to contain the tails of two chipmunks, and so it went. But Dick had beaten them all. In fact they all expected he would win the medal, many of them having seen him shoot before.

Walter Jones came next, and he had one thing in his gamebag that not another in the party could boast of—a black squirrel's tail. There had been but one killed during the day, and it was his rifle that brought it down.

Apparently his face wore a very proud and happy smile as he stepped forward and laid the leathern pouch upon the table, but a close and keen observer would have noticed a queer expression in his light, gray eyes. Proudly opening the bag, he laid out, one by one, the bushy trophies of the hunt, reserving his treasure for the last.

Suddenly his face grew a bit grave, then graver still, and finally quite serious. The black tail of which he was so proud was not there!

He looked about him in sudden bewilderment, first to one, then at another.

"Where can it have gone?" he asked them all. "You know I was the only one who shot a black squirrel, and I wanted to show his tail last. It is not in my bag, and yet where can it have gone?"

No one knew. They looked at each other, but said nothing, and then Dick brought his game bag forward to empty.

Out rolled a pile of red, fluffy tails, followed by long plumes of silver gray, and then, last of all, its sombreness all the plainer because of others surrounding it, came the black squirrel's tail!

Dick was more surprised than any of the others. He stood staring at it as if it had been a snake, while the other men

looked at him, then at one another. How did it come to be in his bag, they asked in subdued whispers.

Our hero was the first one to speak. Dazed, mystified, but never dreaming that they suspected him of being dishonest, he turned to Walter, asking in a low voice:

"Is that your black squirrel's tail, Walter? How did it ever get in my bag?"

His eyes met those of the other, clear, bright, fearless. His voice was filled with surprise, and as bad as he was, Walter Jones dropped his eyes, not daring to look Dick in the face.

"That is for you to answer, not for me," he mumbled, not playing his part as well as he had intended. "I put that tail in my gamebag, and the next thing I find it in yours. I can't answer as to how it got there. You must do that."

For the first time it dawned upon Dick that he was suspected of having stolen the tail. His face flushed, his eyes glittered, and he took a step forward.

"See here, Walter Jones," he said in a low, suppressed voice. "Do you dare infer that I stole your wretched old squirrel's tail? From the tone in which you speak, and the way you look at me, I know that you do. Now, come out and be a man. Don't play the part of a sneak."

"Well, Dick, I don't see any reason why you should get mad and jump on me in that way," Walter begun, but Dick cut him short.

"That will do," he said, crisply. "I want you to answer my question, and no beating about the bush. Say either yes or no. I am not going to wait very long, and if you refuse to answer me, but keep on with that infernal hinting, I'll break your head!"

"Oh, yes, I suppose you would like nothing better than to get a chance at me," Jones sneered. "I know I am not as big as you are, but I am not afraid. Yes, you did steal that squirrel's tail, and you know it! You wanted that medal, and you stole to get it!"

One bound, and Dick was at the accuser's side, his eyes flashing, his face pale as death. Another instant, and he would have had him by the throat, had not Frank Spencer interfered.

"Hold on a bit, Dick," he said. "Wait a minute, and let's see if we can't get at the bottom of this thing. I don't blame you if you punched his head all the way through that wall behind him, but go at it in the proper manner. Now, look here, Jones. How do you know that Dick stole your squirrel's tail?"

"Didn't he find it in his bag?" the other asked, with a show of bravado. "And what was it doing there when I was the only one in the party who shot a black squirrel?"

"Well, the next question is—who put it in his bag?" Frank Spencer asked, sharply. "You did not miss it until now, and you did not see him put it there—your proof is too weak."

"Don't you dare insult me under my own roof!" blustered the cowardly Walter, for at heart he was a coward. "Remember, please, that you are in my father's house, and he will never stand this."

"Suppose we make a thorough investigation," Dick said, with white lips. "This is too serious a matter to let rest, and I will have my name cleared! It is too deep a stain to let die!"

At that instant one of the farm hands, attracted by the sound of loud, angry voices, came to the door and listened to what was going on. His face suddenly brightened when he learned what it was about, and coming forward he said respectfully:

"If you please, sir, Mister Dick wasn't near the game bags this night, for when they came in from the hunt, I took every bag and carried them to the woodshed. Not a soul came out there until after supper, and then it was Mister Walter there

who slipped past me and went out there alone. I can't say how long he was gone, not more than ten minutes anyway, but Mister Dick never left the room this night. Now, sir, there's all I know about it, but Mister Dick, he never stole anything, and I'll stake my life on that, for I've known him ever since he was a boy."

CHAPTER X.

DICK "I WILL" IS CLEARED OF ALL STAINS.

A silence followed the words of the farm hand—a silence deeply oppressive and painful, and the men present looked into each other's faces, yet they did not say a word. They were the guests of Nathan Jones, and they could not very well appear against their host. It was indeed a very embarrassing position for them to be placed in, still what could they do?

Walter spoke first, and it was merely shame that caused him to say what he did. Even then, his eyes were downcast, and he dared not look anyone in the face.

"Well, for my part, I don't see how the tail could ever have worked its way into Dick's gamebag. I was in the room where all the bags were, but the reason I went there, was to get my knife. I left it there in the morning, and I missed it all day. It was only after we were home that I remembered where I put it. I had a long sliver under my thumb nail and I wanted to get it out. So that accounts for my being in the room where the bags were. Say, Dick," he broke in suddenly as if an idea had darted through his head. "You don't suppose you shot a black squirrel long about dusk, and in the uncertain light mistook it for a gray one? You know they are of the same size. That might be the case, you know."

Dick's under lip curled, and he turned away his head while the others present covered their faces with their hands or walked to the other side of the room pretending to look at something else.

It was such a sneaking, cowardly thing to do, such a mean, crawling way to try and get out of it. Yet what could one expect of such a nature?

"No, I did not shoot a black squirrel," our hero answered, calmly, unable to hide the scorn in his voice. "I should have known it, no matter how dark it might have been. Now you are satisfied that I did not take the tail in your bag, or do you still suspect me? If you do, say so, for I want this thing settled. It is the first time in my life that I was ever accused of being a thief, and I will never allow such a stain to hang over me. Out with it now. I am waiting."

"Well, how could I think any differently, when the tail was found in your bag?" Walter whined, uneasily. "Put yourself in my place, Dick. Wouldn't you think the same thing? Of course you would, and so would anyone else. But as long as you did not take it, I'll believe you. I'll take your word for——"

"That will never do," Dick interrupted, sternly. "I want you to come right out in plain English, and say that you believe me innocent. I will listen to nothing else. You know in your heart and soul that I never meddled with any of the bags, and if you don't end this wretched affair, and end it mighty soon, too, I'll settle with you myself. And you've seen me punish a few fellows in the past, and so you know what to expect."

Walter's face grew a bit pale, for he had seen Dick punish

severely one or two smart young chaps who had spoken falsely of him, and he did not care to receive the same treatment.

At the same time he knew he would keep his word. More than that, he would be upheld by everyone present. It was either apologize or take the results. The former he hated to do, the latter he feared. A bitter morsel indeed for the rich farmer's son to swallow.

Every eye in the room was fastened upon his face, and in his heart, although they were his guests, he knew they were longing to see him chastised.

He looked around him. No, there was no pity, not a spark, stamped upon the faces there before him. Once, twice, thrice, he swallowed the big lump that arose in his throat before he could speak. His lips were dry and clung together, and his breast was filled with a rage such as he had never known before.

"Come, I am waiting, and I am not the most patient person in the world," Dick said impatiently. "If the evening's pleasure was to be ruined by the dispute between us, suppose we go outside and settle it, and not cast a shadow over the ending of the day's sport."

Nathan Jones muttered something beneath his breath about beggars, but his remarks were not heeded. He would have liked nothing better than to have taken our hero by the collar and pitched him through the door out into the night.

"Well, I'll take it back," Walter muttered, sheepishly. "I don't want to spoil the entire evening for the rest, and I see no reason why we should go out of doors in order to settle it. It is better to stay in here where the others can hear every word. I suppose you are satisfied now?"

"No, I am not satisfied," grimly. "I want an open apology, and—I will have it! You can't get out of it this way, and I should say it is far better for you to remain in here. You don't want to go outside, Walter, you know you don't. I'll wait just five minutes longer and then by Jove, if you don't come right out and act like a man, I'll insist upon your going with me where we'll have it out!"

Dick was getting really angry now. His eyes flashed and he went nearer the coward, who hastily drew back in fear. He saw that he could dilly-dally no longer, so he resolved to save his own head, so to speak, for he did not relish appearing before the girls with a black eye or a swollen lip.

"I am sure I beg your pardon, Dick," very faintly. "I—I spoke impulsively, and if I had stopped to think, I never should have said what I did. We—we are all apt to commit blunders sometimes, you know."

Dick nodded, saying briefly:

"Very well; I accept your apology. But—let it be the last time you accuse me of taking an article that does not belong to me. You know when you said it that it was a downright falsehood. As to how it got in my gamebag," his clear eyes meeting the other's shifting ones, "we will leave for a sharper brain than either yours or mine to solve."

That ended the matter. Dick "I Will" was cleared of the stain that only a few moments before had rested upon him, and the remainder of the evening was passed in the games and dances which all young folks enjoy so well. There was music and songs, and, best of all, a chance to whisper a few tender words in some fair maiden's dainty ear, for every old farm house has secluded nooks and corners where tiny Cupid ever lurks. Ah, youth is ever blessed—ever happy—in spite of poverty and trials!

CHAPTER XI.

"HE IS TRAINING PRINCESS RONNIE, FATHER."

Walter did not speak to our hero again that evening. Of course, it could not fail to be noticed, and another strange

thing was the absence of Edith Cross. She was not there, neither was her mother. Then the story of Hope leaving the Cross household, and making her home with the Rev. Joseph Cornell, had been talked over by the whole county, of course, being drawn upon and enlarged each time it was discussed. Yet nearly all the neighbors were in sympathy with the young girl, for they knew she had been a mere drudge, and all for a few scanty, worn-out clothes, that had once belonged to Edith, and the plain food that was grudgingly doled out to her.

In spite of the fact that Major Cross was reported well to do, the Rev. Joseph Cornell held a mortgage on his farm, and had for years. Not that the kind-hearted man had ever told anyone of it, nor did he even ask for his interest. When there was company present, Mrs. Cross entertained lavishly, and her table fairly groaned beneath its weight of good things. But once they had departed, the jellies and jams were securely locked up in the closet, the key safely stored away in her ample pocket. The fine china was banished to its dark corners there to await the arrival of the next visitors, the silver was carefully polished, wrapped in thick layers of flannel, and stored carefully away, not to see the light of day again until another state occasion. They were simply like hundreds of other farmers—great at making an outside show, but very poor home liners. It is a mistaken idea that farmers use the best of everything, when the truth of the matter is, the choicest of everything is sent to the city market. Skimmed milk is plenty good enough for the farm hands, says the housewife, with cream bringing such a big price in the city. Tender spring chickens are too dear to place upon the table when there are plenty willing to buy them, and there is salt pork in the barrel for the men who possess such appetites. So it is with fruit. Dried apples left over from last year take the place of great ruby-hued berries and juicy melons. New potatoes are shipped and sold, for old ones, no matter if they are strong, do just as well to fry. Do you wonder then that the farmer is always complaining of indigestion? The only marvel is that he lives so long.

So it was with the Cross family. And Hope, our dainty heroine, found a vastly different home with her friend Della.

"Dear child, I am only too glad to have you here as a companion to my wild girlie," the clergyman had said very gently, for she needs one gentle and mild such as you, to subdue her natural gay spirits. I welcome you to your new home, the same as I would a beloved daughter, for you are to be my daughter from now out."

"Glory!" Della cried, dancing about the room, too overcome with joy to stand still. "Glory, Hope, only think of it! You are to be my sister, my own dear sister, and we'll have no end of fun here now! I——"

"Hush, hush, my child, do not let your spirits run away with you," her father broke in. "Remember that this dear child takes the place of one long since gone out of our lives, but not our memory. She can never outlive that," his voice trembling. "She would have been about Hope's age, too, for you, I should judge, are a trifle older. But we will not speak of that now, for it clouds our newly found joy."

Thus was Hope welcomed to her new home, a far different welcome than she had received at the Cross household. And life seemed bright and cheerful to her at last. For the first time she was really happy.

Mrs. Cross did not ask her to come back, though she would very much have liked to. When it was too late she saw her mistake, for she was obliged to hire an extra girl to do Hope's work. Even then she growled because of the labor she was compelled to do, saying it was the hardest place she had ever worked in. As for the fair Edith being asked to dip her

dainty fingers in dish water, such a question was unthought of.

Thus a year passed away, nothing out of the usual run happening. There were sleighing parties, skating contests, in fact, all such sports that are popular in country towns. And through it all, Dick never for a single instant faltered in his resolution to gain his point. He did not say much, but he was none the less earnest. He kept his plans to himself, and some days Nathan Jones believed he had given up all hope of getting the education he craved, but he did not know him. Dick "I Will" had gained that name honestly.

Walter, however, kept a closer watch upon him than did his father. In the first place he was shrewder, and he was insanely jealous of our hero. He was determined to stop him too, if it were possible. So when Dick believed that he was alone, Master Walter was sneaking around watching and listening.

Dick used to retire to his room very early, but that was not strange at all, for it had been his habit for years to do so. Those hours after his day's work was done were the only ones he had to study, and he made good use of them.

One night Walter made a discovery that filled him with glee. His narrow, petty nature rejoiced, and he hastened to his father with the startling news.

"I've just found out what makes him sneak off to his room so early every night, father," he cried with a chuckle. "I never got onto it before; now I see through the whole business. Do you know what he's doing every single night of his life?"

"No, I can't say that I do," the farmer answered in some surprise, looking up from his paper over the tops of his glasses. "What's he up to now? Some new scheme to get away to school?"

Walter nodded his head.

"He's laughing to himself, thinking he will beat us yet," he said. "But he don't know that I found out. He is training Princess Bonnie, father, in the hopes of winning the prize at the County Fair this year. He hopes to win the purse. But that mare will never win. Some night, though, I shall follow him on horseback, and just satisfy myself if there's any good in her. If there is—well, I bet I'll fix it some way so that I'll get her. I've always wanted a good horse, but I never thought she would amount to anything. Why, don't you remember what a poor, sick, wretched colt she was when you gave her to him? I never thought she would live. She's a beauty, no mistake about that, but the next thing is, can she run?"

CHAPTER XII.

"I WILL BLOCK HIS LITTLE GAME."

Nathan Jones was silent for a few moments, his withered face wearing a thoughtful expression. Then he looked up at his son.

"So you're sure he's training her?" he asked, stroking his grizzled beard. "It never struck me before that he was, but now come to think of it, I shouldn't wonder a mite. Well, as you say, she's a regular beauty, and no mistake. If I had any idea that she would turn out to be any good, I would have stopped to think before I ever gave her to him. But she was such a sick-looking beast that I was glad to get rid of her."

"Yes, I know, but what is that to us now?" Walter asked. "If he trains her well, and enters her in the race, and she happens to win, what will be the result? He will have the

money to buy his time of you, and enough left to go to school and make a gentleman of himself. I hate him too much to see him do that," setting his teeth together with a sharp, snapping sound; "and you know he has only another year to work for you, so the price now is smaller by one half than it was a year ago. Oh, he is a shrewd one, I tell you."

Suddenly Nathan Jones laughed outright, as if a sudden, happy thought had occurred to him.

"By golly, I've got it now!" he said, heartily, slapping one hand down upon his knee. "And he can't get out of it, even if he wins the race. I will block his little game, I will, or my name ain't Nathan Jones."

"What do you mean, father?" Walter asked, in a puzzled, yet eager voice. "I haven't the faintest idea, but hurry and tell me."

"Old heads are better after all than young ones, my boy," the farmer chuckled in evident glee. "And I'll bet my coin money, every dollar of it, that you would never have even thought of such a thing. Ha, ha, ha! Your old dad knows more in one minute than you'll know in your whole life."

"I see no sense in your keeping me waiting so long, father," Walter remarked impatiently. "Why don't you tell me what you refer to, and have done with it?"

"Now, don't you crow too loud, sonny," the farmer retorted, for there were times when his son's attempt at airs made him angry. "Please remember that your old father is doing the talking, and if it wasn't for him where would you be?"

Master Walter calmed down a bit. He knew when he had gone too far, and he dared not offend his father, for he was not capable of earning his own living, and he was well aware of the fact. So he waited in seeming patience, yet longing to get up and leave the room.

"I ain't asleep, though a good many smart young folks think I am," the farmer said, slowly, lighting his pipe and puffing away at the tube of discolored clay, for Nathan Jones was too thrifty to indulge in anything but a clay pipe. "Now, you listen to me. If Dick enters that mare and she wins the race, what do you think I am going to do? Of course he will offer to buy his time of me, and all that. Well, sir, I shall put in a bill for stabling and feeding Princess Bonnie for three years!"

Walter looked at his father aghast. Mean as he was, it was such a petty trick that it took his breath completely away; and yet he was glad to hear it, for it would serve to defeat his rival.

He always had looked upon Dick as his rival, though why he should I am unable to say, for poor Dick never thought to outrival anyone. He had gone on in his own way, thinking no ill, no evil of any man, woman or child. All he wanted was to accomplish his object in life, and he felt that sooner or later he would do so.

"Well, father, you have a good, long head, and no mistake," Walter finally said, a gleam of admiration at the elder man's shrewdness shining in his pale eyes; "that is the best thing I have heard in many a day. How did you happen to think of it?"

"Never mind how I happened to think of it," his father answered. "But don't you say a word. You just let him go on training the mare, and pretend that you know nothing about it. Let him enter her at the County Fair races, and when he springs it on me that he's ready to pay for his last year of time, I'll just spring it on him about Princess Bonnie's board bill for three years. On account of her having won the race he'll be more than anxious to enter her again next year, and before he'll part with her he'll give up going to college for another year. Oh, we can fix him all right. But, by

golly! if that mare is any good, I'll have her, or my name ain't Nathan Jones!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NUTTING PARTY, AND HOPE'S PERIL.

Farmer Nathan Jones and his worthy son Walter slept better that night than they had for many a week. They felt secure in the belief that they could place a stumbling block in the way of our brave Dick "I Will." Ah, how little they knew the character of the boy with whom they had to deal.

As usual, that night Dick had Princess Bonnie out for her gallop. He knew the value of a good horse, and he had raised her up from a colt. No one knew the hours he had passed in nursing the small, sickly animal. But now he felt that his efforts were about to be rewarded and all would be well.

"They little dream what a gold mine is in those slender, graceful limbs of yours, my beauty," he said, stroking her velvet nose with loving hands. "Ah, how we have fooled them! And how we will fool them again. It has been a hard, hard struggle, but in the end we have conquered. And one year from to-day will see you in a luxurious stable, your own private stall made of polished hardwood, not this rough dingy hole, the meanest, poorest corner in the barn. And your master will be something beside a bound boy! Ah, well, my princess, time works many a wonder. We are not the first to come up from the stable to the palace nor will we be the last. Brace up now, like a good girl, for we are off for our usual spin."

The intelligent mare seemed to understand all he said to her, for she pricked up her sharp ears, and tossed her dainty head. Then he led her forth, her small iron-shod hoofs making no sound on the straw-covered floor of the big barn. Out in the moonlight, he vaulted into the saddle, and an instant later was riding swiftly toward the hills, where he always exercised her. Ah, but it was rare sport, dashing onward in the silver moonlight, feeling those satiny sides between his legs, knowing full well that in this dainty creature he had a small fortune. The hopes he builded, the dreams he dreamed, but youth is full of hopes and dreams, and we know them but once.

Dick was very quiet regarding his plans for his gallant little mare and himself, for if she failed to win the race, then his hopes for the future would be shattered also, for upon her speed and strength he depended entirely.

Walter Jones chuckled wickedly when he saw our hero taking his horse out for a gallop over the hills, and setting his teeth he vowed that he should never win the great race of the year, for in that part of the country it was considered a great race.

"Go on, you silly fool, and train that mare to your heart's content," he would mutter, with an evil smile. "It is all the good it will do you, for she shall never run any if she does, she shall never win the race. That I swear, and when I take an oath of that nature it requires a good deal to break it! So, Mr. Dick Barker, look out for yourself and for your mare, too!"

Dick did not dream that he had been watched, and he did not know that every move of his had been spied upon. So he went his way, blissfully content, hoping against hope, and seeing himself a famous man in the years to come.

After the big hunt there was a very sharp frost, followed

by a few days of warm, balmy weather, as fragrant and agreeable as June. And as good luck would have it, the young people of Burrville seized upon the very last day as the one for their nutting party. In a large grove about two miles from the village, the huge beech trees were loaded with the shining brown nuts, whose shells glistened like satin beneath the sun's warm rays. There our party intended to pass an entire day, starting early in the morning and returning in the evening. There would be lunch and a jolly time taken all in all.

The start was made from the home of Nathan Jones, because it was nearer the grove than any other residence about there. And it is safe to add that not a single boy or girl missed that nutting party.

It was clear, crisp and frosty, when they started, and the girls were all glad to wrap themselves in thick, warm woolen shawls. The long six and eight-seated wagons were already waiting for them, and oh! what a jolly day they would have! Our boys and girls, born and brought up in New York City, know nothing of the sports and pleasures of their country brothers and sisters.

As good luck would have it, Dick was in the same wagon with Della Cornell and Hope. I need not add that Frank Spencer found a place there also.

Amid shouts of merry laughter and careless, happy chatter, the thoughtless party drove away, the cracking of the long-lashed whips, the rattle of the wheels over the rough roads, sounding above the many fresh young voices. The sun was just beginning to glow red and rosy in the east, and a bright hoar frost covered the dead brown grass and withered leaves that lay in sodden mounds in the fence corners. It was quite a drive to the grove, and before the day's frolics would begin, breakfast must be cooked and eaten. Not that it was at all needed, for everyone had partaken of the morning meal, but it was such fun to cook over a glowing fire beneath the morning sky.

The sun was high before they reached the grove, and while the boys were unhitching the horses from the wagons, the girls busied themselves in preparing the breakfast in true gypsy fashion. It was eaten amidst much merriment, and then when the dishes were washed and packed away, the young folks wandered off in search of the brown, tempting nuts, whose flavor cannot be equalled by any other nut that grows.

Reader, have you ever been "beech-nutting?" But of course you have, so I will leave it all to your vivid imagination and to memory. No boy or girl brought up on a country farm ever missed the chance to go "nutting." As for those who have been denied that great blessing, I am truly sorry for them.

Gradually the young people pared off in couples, each couple wandering in different directions from the others. Although Walter Jones tried his best to reach the side of pretty Hope, he was bitterly disappointed, for Dick was already at her side, while Frank Spencer and pretty Della Cornell wandered off together. So Master Walter had to content himself with the society of Susie Martin, a stupid, red-haired girl, whose open adoration for him had long been a standing jest among his companions.

Poor Susie was at first in a perfect heaven of rapture, for she believed that he had preferred her to the other girls. But she soon realized her mistake by his gruff and rude manner. Stupid as she was, she could not fail to see it very plainly, and the day she had looked forward to as being so bright, was dull and gloomy enough.

Not so with our hero and pretty Hope. At first they were both inclined to be silent and somewhat reserved, but gradually that feeling wore away, and they were soon in the

merriest of moods. Neither the young girl nor her companion ever forgot that day, and for the first time Dick "I Will" had the smallest basket of any in the crowd, a fact which was greeted with shouts of laughter when the party met that night.

It was in the middle of the afternoon that Hope wandered off a short distance from him, catching sight of a large tree well laden with choice nuts.

The warm sun had dried the dead leaves, and not a sound was heard in the grove.

Dick lingered behind her for a few moments, having found a rare nest of the nuts, and then missing her he arose from his knees to go in pursuit of her. As he did so his heart gave a great leap of terror, and then seemed to stand still, for only a few yards distant, standing like a statue, her face whiter than death itself stood Hope, her eyes fixed in terror upon some object directly before her.

Our hero's eyes sought that object, and the very blood within his veins seemed turning to waves of ice while his limbs grew numb, for in front of her, its horrible head waving from side to side, its forked tongue darting swiftly back and forth, its little fiery eyes glowing, was a huge rattlesnake!

No wonder that both Hope and Dick were both powerless from fear and terror, for the loathsome reptile was all ready to spring upon the helpless girl and bury its deadly fangs in her body. It was so near her, that she could not escape, even had she not been terror-stricken and dazed. God help her, it seemed that she was doomed. No power upon earth could save her from her awful, awful fate.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUNTY FAIR.

A hundred different ideas darted through our hero's head like keen-edged flashes of lightning. He had no weapon, there was none near at hand, and what was he to do? To the last hour of his life Richard Barker never forgot those few brief fleeting moments that seemed to his tortured mind like so many years. He lived a lifetime while he stood there, each instant expecting to see the snake spring upon its helpless victim.

His first impulse had been to rush forward, and throw himself between the young girl and the reptile, but a second later he saw that such a move would endanger both their lives. A cold sweat broke out on his brow, and his teeth chattered together.

"My heavens!" he muttered, hoarsely. "What shall I do? What shall I do? I can't save her, I can't!" and then as the full meaning of the terrible peril the girl he loved was in, he clenched his hands until the nails cut into the flesh.

"I will save her!" he panted, his eyes flashing, his nostrils dilating. "I will save her if I die the instant later. Oh, Hope, Hope! What would I have to live for if you should be taken out of my life."

In a sudden, frenzied desperation he looked about him to see if there was a stone or some kind of a weapon with which he would be enabled to defend himself. And he could hardly suppress the cry of joy that arose from his thankful heart when he saw a heavy, knotted stick lying upon the ground close beside him.

One mighty bound, and it was in his strong hands while new life and hope sprang up within his breast. The icy cold-

ness that had enwrapped him, gave place to warmth and fire. Never stopping to think of what the result might be, he gathered his muscles together, and with a swift, agile bound was upon the hideous serpent. His face was actually bloodless, his eyes gleaming, his teeth set, and he never expected to see another sun rise or set, but he would not have drawn back for all the world. Wild horses could not have held him.

He was never able to tell how it happened afterwards, but the heavy stick came down with crushing force on the snake's head, leaving a long, horrible, writhing body lying in convulsive agony upon the ground.

It was a full moment ere he realized what had happened, and then a sudden weakness overcame him, and he thought he must surely fall to the ground. But he chanced to look at Hope, and the sight of the young girl's white face and swaying figure gave him a new strength.

He was just in time to catch her in his arms, for another instant would have seen her lying beside the serpent whose victim she had almost been. And as she lay there in our hero's arms, her flower-like face pillowed against his broad shoulder, all he could compare her to was a frail, white lily.

In a few moments she opened her eyes and looked at him, first shudderingly, fearfully, as if expecting to again meet the glance of those small, fiery orbs whose baleful gleam had fascinated her. A shudder of horror swept her slight figure from head to foot, for the ordeal through which she had passed could not soon be forgotten.

"You are safe, Hope," Dick whispered in her ear. "So do not tremble so. I will protect you from all and every one of life's rough blasts, the same as I have to-day. Hope, Hope, my dear little girl, you ought to know how dear you are to me!"

Aye, she did know, but her natural shyness kept her silent. Her heart was throbbing thick and fast, but her lips were mute and yet the pressure of those strong, warm arms about her, the clasp of his firm hand sent a thrill through her maiden bosom that she had never known before.

He waited a few moments before speaking, and then he went on, his voice tremulous with emotion:

"We are both young, Hope, we are only boy and girl, I know, but that cannot make the love within our hearts any the less. If I live to be a hundred years old, it would not make you any dearer to me. Love is not measured by years, but by heart throbs. We are alone in the world, why then should we be desolate? I am going to make a name for myself, dear—a name that will live long after I am dead. There are many who laugh at me and call me a dreamer, but time will tell. It is hard work, uphill-work, but I never yet failed in anything I attempted to do. Nor shall I fail in my life's purpose. A few years from now and we shall be happy, you and me, and all our sorrows be forgotten. We will have to wait, and be patient. Are you willing to wait for me, Hope?"

She bowed her curly head and was silent. Then she looked at him again.

"I will wait, no matter if it be ten, twenty, thirty years," she answered, in a whisper. "But long before that time you will have forgotten me. With success will come a change of heart, and Hope White, the poor, homeless dependent, who does not know who her parents are, will have no place in your heart or life. It is all very well now, but later——"

He gently silenced her.

"Hush," he said, kindly, but firmly. "You know me too well, Hope, to talk like that. But there is no need for me to say more. Time, success, all the money in the wide world can never change me. And you ought to know that better than anyone else. But we must not stay here any longer,

Hope. The rest of the party will be looking for us, and it is not right to keep them waiting. You know the County Fair begins day after to-morrow, and between what you have to do, and what I have to do, we shall be kept pretty busy. I suppose, of course, that you have a lot of fancy work to exhibit," laughing. "All girls usually have."

"No, I have no fancy work, but I have one or two pencil sketches that Mr. Cornell says are good enough to be put on exhibition—in fact, he insists that I exhibit them," she answered, modestly, "and I really believe I will do so."

The County Fair! Ah, what a host of memories come thronging before me at the mere mention. I can see it all to this very day. The fat horses, the sleek cattle, the clucking hens and turkeys, the big loads of yellow pumpkins, and jars of jellies and jams. Then the bands, the throngs of men and women, who would no more think of losing this yearly holiday than they would of not keeping Christmas or New Year's. The swings and little side booths, where all kinds of useless articles are sold, and—— Well, I don't like to write about it, for it really makes me homesick—that dear old County Fair!

CHAPTER XV.

THE RACE OF THE YEAR.

The nutting party was voted a grand success, and it was not until they were all homeward bound that the story of Hope's peril and Dick's heroic deed became known. Then there were little shrieks of terror mingled with ohs and ahs, while our hero would have been crowned with laurels had the impulsive crowd possessed any.

"And to think that you were in such peril, Hope, dear," one of the girls fluttered. "Dear, dear, I shall not be able to sleep to-night."

"I am as well as ever," Hope laughed. "It was merely a scare, that was all, and I am not one bit the worse for it. But you should have seen Dick kill that snake. One blow, and his snakeship never knew what hurt him. Ugh! he was a wicked-looking customer, too."

Edith Cross, who was one of the party, said nothing. But in her heart and soul she wished that Dick's strong arm had not been so strong, for in her wicked heart she would have rejoiced to see Hope lying dead before her. And Walter Jones felt the same concerning Dick "I Will."

They reached home safely, and nothing more was said concerning Hope's narrow escape or Dick's heroic act. It was all the County Fair. Nothing else was talked of, nothing else was thought of. It would last three days, and to surrounding country people those three days were one grand long holiday of pleasure.

The third day was the race, to be sure quite a different affair from the Handicap or the Suburban, but it created fully as much interest in and about Burryville, as either of the two named. It was all excitement, for there was a good-sized purse up.

Not a whisper, not a lisp had been heard that Dick had entered Princess Bonnie, at the Jones' farm, and the boy's heart beat high with hope and happiness, for he wanted to surprise them. Then too, he feared treachery should they learn of it too soon.

Hope's drawings were also on exhibition, and the young girl was amazed at the praise they received. She had never taken a lesson in her life, but she was a natural born artist. It was as easy for her to draw as it was for the other girls

to write, and the little sketches she had made during an idle hour, bade fair to make her a name and a reputation as an artist.

Poor Hope! Life for her had always been so gray and gloomy that she could hardly realize her good fortune. Her lovely face was wreathed in smiles, but she was very calm. And Dick was prouder even of her success than she was.

The fair was a grand success. In fact, there had not been so successful a one for many years. This year everything seemed to go right. The cows and horses were sleeker, fatter, more contented looking and juicy, and it seemed as if every housewife had outdone herself in the way of patchwork and pickles. But best of all, was the last thing—the race of the year!

Everything was in readiness. The track was smooth and even, not a lump as big as a penny could be seen. The sun shone bright and warm, the band played a popular air, and the throng in the grand stand sat motionless waiting for the horses and riders.

Among those who appeared to be the most deeply interested, were Walter Jones and his worthy father. They were both very nervous, and the elder chewed away on a bit of rank tobacco as if his very life depended upon it, while the younger one grinned nervously.

At last the shrill whistle of a trumpet announced the coming of both men and horses. The starter, who had once witnessed the Brooklyn Handicap, believed in "doing things up in city style," as he expressed it, and since that time the trumpet had played a prominent part in every race. He was a very dignified person, and highly respected by the citizens of Burrville.

Out they came, one by one, all wearing his own favorite color, and last of all came Princess Bonnie, and her young master. He wore national colors—red, white and blue.

It was a great surprise to everyone present, and many arose in their seats with wide open eyes and gaping mouths. They had not dreamed of seeing Nathan Jones' bound boy in the race, and with such a horse. Why, the mare was a perfect beauty. From her dainty hoofs up to her sharp-pointed ears she was a model. No wonder the crowd stared and stared.

"Waal, by gosh, she's a durned fine critter," was heard on every side. "And whar did he git her? She's worth money, I tell yer."

Princess Bonnie seemed to understand her own worth, for she tossed her dainty head, the ribbons in her mane fluttering gayly, and then as Dick vaulted lightly into the saddle, lifting his cap gracefully to the cheering crowd, the bell was sounded, the horses formed in line, and after just so much waiting and fussing about, the start was made.

Princess Bonnie took the lead and kept it up, too, very easily, and as the cheers grew louder and louder, Nathan Jones grew ghastly, while his son did not look much better.

"By golly," the farmer muttered thickly, "I wonder if that durned fool of a boy has made a mistake. I'll bet a dollar he has, and we've ruined our own horse!"

It was very plain that Nathan Jones and his worthy son had been up to some nasty, sneaking trick, else why such a remark? It was entirely uncalled for, and the expression upon both their faces showed their guilt.

"It is Princess Bonnie, as sure as you're born, father!" Walter gasped. "Why—why——"

"Yes, it is Princess Bonnie, and you've gone like the durned fool that you are, and given the pills to the wrong horse!" the farmer sputtered, almost beside himself, "and now that beggar's mare will win the race, and we'll be so much out, for that colt will never be any good again after

that infernal drug goes through her system. Hang the luck, I wish I had attended to the thing myself."

"And so do I," Walter retorted, sulkily, "for when everything goes wrong you lay it on me. Now, you will blame me for your colt's being spoiled, and yet you expected me to do the thing right, and in the dark, too. Next time do it yourself."

"See here, young man, don't you talk back to me," his father said, sternly. "Don't you forget for a solitary minute that I'm your father and your boss, and I ain't going to stand no impudence from you, sir. You're the one that put up the job, and by golly I won't take all the blame!"

"In the first place you had no business giving Dick that colt, and you know it," Walter growled. "But of course when you once gave it to him you can't take it back. Next time maybe you won't be quite so generous about giving things away."

"How was I to know whether the colt would live or die?" his father grumbled. "It was such a worthless, miserable sickly looking beast, that I was glad to get rid of it. If I had known that it would ever have grown into a decent horse with any vim in it, you can bet he would never have got his hands on it. As it is, we can only make the best of it. But how the dickens did you ever happen to give Flora those pills? I warned you to be careful, and you know it just as well as I do."

"It's too late to cry over spilt milk now," Walter sulked. "He'll come out ahead, you see if he don't, for that mare is sure to win. If I hadn't been afraid of her, I'd never have bothered with the pills. She was too dangerous a customer to let alone. Now he'll be able to go to school and come out on top."

"Well, you had ten chances to his one, and it's your own fault that you're not ahead of him," was the only consolation he got from his father. "If a fellow hain't got any brains, who's to blame for it?"

"I'm glad you are able to appreciate your bound boy," the son sneered, "and I suppose you will be glad to see him win. But when you have to pay another one in his place, you will not feel quite so good over it. Money and friendship don't go hand in hand."

The gallant Princess Bonnie kept up the pace all the way round. Not for a single instant did she lag behind, on the contrary each stride forward seemed to infuse a new life and vigor into her sleek limbs. And the crowd in the grand stand shouted until it seemed as if their throats must surely burst. Every eye was fastened upon the bits of well-known, well-beloved colors—red, white and blue—and every pair of lips silently prayed that the gallant little mare would win. And their prayers were answered, for with a sudden outburst of speed that amazed even her owner, Princess Bonnie sprang forward, her eyes blazing, her nostrils dilated, every nerve beneath her satiny skin aquiver. A great shout went up from both men and women, and then like a gayly colored flash, the brave little mare shot past the winning post the victor by a full head!

Such cheering was never before heard upon the fair grounds of Burrville, and both Walter Jones and his worthy father would gladly have throttled the noble mare and her youthful owner, for the prize was his. He had won at last, and the way seemed clear and full of hope. But alas! how little he knew of what lay before him. Oftentimes when the star of

hope shines brightest, the hidden storm clouds are darkest and heaviest. But, who can describe the workings of fate. To-day may be all sunshine; to-morrow all clouds, and we alas! poor mortals, must bear it all in silence and patience.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MY BOY, YOUR PLUCK HAS WON, AND THE PURSE IS YOURS."

Yes, Princess Bonnie had won the race of the year, and our hero felt richer and prouder than any king, for now his hopes would be realized, his ambitions gratified, and he could be a man among men.

Frank Spencer was fully as happy as Dick, and when he wrung his hand in warm friendship, he exclaimed:

"By Jove, old man, you are in ahead at last, and you were rightly named, for if ever I knew a chap who possesses an iron will, you are that chap. God bless you, but I'm as tickled as you are."

Dick returned the warm hand pressure, and his bright eyes were dim. He was possessed of a very tender nature, a loving heart, and he appreciated a true friend, but alas, he had so few. All his life long he had pined for love and sympathy, but he had found so little of either. Now, it seemed as though fate intended to atone richly for her past unkindness.

His heart swelled with pride when he looked at the noble mare whose speed had entirely changed his entire fortune, and he stroked her satin nose tenderly.

"Don't praise me, Frank," he answered, laughingly. "Give your praise where it is due—to Princess Bonnie, for she is the heroine of the hour. Heaven bless her, she has saved me from a life of toil and misery!"

He was careful to blanket the mare and lead her quickly away to the stables, and he would allow no one else to touch her. He had trained her, and now that she had triumphed, he would still care for her comforts, he said.

The handsome floral wreath had already been hung about the silken neck, and tossing her dainty head proudly, as if she realized what she had done for her young master, Princess Bonnie followed him. Cheer after cheer rent the air as she was led away, and they grew still louder when he once more reappeared before the excited throng.

He did not have to stand there, bowing and smiling in response to their calls, for he was naturally modest, but what else could he do? He could not be rude when they received him so kindly, but he would far rather have stolen quietly away.

The only two persons present who did not join in the cheering were Nathan Jones and his son, who both sat near with scowling faces. Their sullen manner was soon noticed, and there were smiles upon every face.

"They take it rather hard, eh?" went from one to another, "and after all the years the boy has worked like a dog, too. One would suppose they would of course be glad to see him get on in the world."

"That's not the style of Nathan Jones," another near neighbor of the speaker's replied. "And they say that the son is just about like the father, if anything he's meaner."

"Well, Dick will soon be free now, for I can tell you that the purse he's won to-day ain't no very small sum. Whew! but

how friend Nathan will fume!" the other laughed. "I'm mighty glad to see the boy rid of him, for he's the hardest man in the country to work for. Mean to his help even when he pays no wages. And poor Dick only had his board for his work. Why I've seen that boy ready to drop when he'd come in from the field, and then that old catamount always had extra work for him about the stables."

It was very easy to see how our hero stood with all the farmers in and about Burrville. They all liked him from the oldest to the youngest, for his kindness of heart and his struggle to accomplish his ambition was known far and wide. Many a man with means would have sent him to school, but Nathan Jones knew his power, and wickedly refused. Perhaps he would not have been so bad were it not for his son Walter, who was so jealous of our hero.

Dick was happiest when he received the whispered congratulations of pretty Hope White, and his heart throbbed while his boyish face flushed. And then the distinguished-looking stranger whose life he had saved, came up to him, his hand outstretched, his kindly face aglow.

"My boy, your pluck has won, and the purse is yours. In five years from to-day, I shall expect to read of Richard Barker as one of our leading young men, and I shall not be mistaken, either."

"Thank you, sir," our hero answered, modestly. "I shall surely do my best, and I will not fail for the want of hard work."

"Hard work is the best thing in the world for a young man," and a shade of the sadness swept over the fine face. "That is the right kind of hard work. And," with a deep sigh, "the best thing to cause one to forget."

Dick looked at him curiously. He had wealth, position, in fact, everything that the heart could wish for, and yet he was not happy. His life seemed shadowed by some deep sorrow, and his face showed it too. Boy though he was, Dick could read in his eyes that his heart was sad and heavy.

"I shall never forget your kindness to me, sir," the boy said suddenly, why, he was never able to say, but a queer impulse caused him to say it. For some unknown reason he had always felt drawn toward this man, who was so far above him in everything.

"I have never done anything for you, my boy, that you should thank me, though God knows I would have been the happiest man in all the world had I only been allowed to," was the reply, given in a husky voice. "But some day it may come all right. At any rate, I hope so. Well, good-by, and God bless you."

With those words he turned abruptly away, leaving Dick standing and staring after him in amazement, for from the sound of his voice the boy was sure he strangled a sob, and a strong man's sob of hopeless despair and great grief—well, I heard but one in all my life, which is by no means a short one, and God grant that I may never hear another. I can bear a woman's tears, for they are like an April shower, but a man's—ah, they are too fierce, too bitter, and they seem to scorch and blister the wretched eyes from which they fall.

But what use have we for tears and sighs, since Princess Bonnie had won the purse which will make our boy hero the man he has always hoped and longed to be? We are done with them and so is he, therefore let us leave them out of his life for the day. And even the sun shines brightly on this

autumn day, as if it too, rejoiced that virtue and honesty had conquered vice and selfishness.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I KNOW ALL, AND YET I AM WILLING TO FORGET ALL."

Dick returned quietly to the farm and went about his tasks as though nothing of importance had taken place that day. Walter did not even look at him, but sat sulking all the evening. His father, however, could not contain himself, and at supper he remarked sulkily:

"I suppose you feel mighty big and set up because you have won the race to-day?"

"No, sir, I am not at all set up, as you put it," Dick answered in a respectful tone, but with a smile which he strove to conceal. "It is but natural, however, that I should feel proud of Princess Bonnie when she has shown herself to be such a fine mare. And then I also take a little credit for her training."

"Yes, and a fine way you took to train her," Walter broke in. "Sneaking off nights without a word to anybody. I would never have done such a thing."

"I had no other time to train her," was Dick's quiet reply, "and my time was my own when my tasks were done for the day. As for telling you or your father, why should I? You would have planned to stop me in some way or other."

"Don't forget your manners, sir, because you've got a little money," Nathan Jones retorted, wrathfully. "You will please remember that I taught you all you know, and but for me where would you be anyway? Answer me that if you can, sir."

Dick looked at the farmer, and his under lip curled.

"I should be much farther along in the world than I am to-day," was the calm answer, and he looked him full in the face, never for a single instant flinching. "I might have something and be where I ought to be."

"You would be still in the place I took you from, and I'm sorry now that I didn't let you stay there," savagely peeling an apple. "For of all the ungrateful cubs that I ever saw, you are the worst. Where did you get the mare that won you the race to-day? Who gave her to you?"

"I must admit that you gave me the noble mare whose speed to-day was the means of changing my whole life, and making my future," Dick answered, promptly. "But—do you remember why you gave her to me? What was she then? A sickly, weak colt whom no one, not even I, believed she would live. I cared for her, nursed her out of pure, simple pity, for I could not bear to see her suffer. And even had she never amounted to anything I should still have been glad to do as I did. Then when I saw there was something in her, I made up my mind to train her, and enter her for the race. How well I succeeded, you are able to see for yourself. And while I must thank you for the gift of the colt, yet to myself alone I am grateful for what she has proven to be."

"That's it," the farmer growled. "You're like all such young cubs, filled full of selfish ingratitude. But look here, you owe me for that mare's board, just three nice long

years. I ain't going to keep no fancy horses for nobody for nothing, you can bet on that."

Nathan Jones was apt to sometimes forget his polished and much studied language, and now that he was excited, he relapsed back into his own ways.

Dick looked up at him quickly, his face growing pale and anxious. He had never thought of such a thing before, believing that his labor on the farm was sufficient for both his keeping and that of Princess Bonnie. If he should be obliged to hand over the sum of money he had won at the race, it would be hard indeed, for it would result in more slavery, for he expected to have to pay double its worth in order to buy his freedom.

"Will you kindly tell me what you consider me indebted to you for?" the boy asked, his lips quivering, for he knew well what to expect. "It might just as well be settled now as any other time."

"Here, Walter, since you're good at figures, you just add it up," the farmer said, for he and Walter knew the exact amount of money Dick had in his possession, and they determined to get every dollar of it away from him. "He knows what it will cost him to buy his time of me, so add the mare's board and keep to it."

Dick sat silent while Walter, with a grin upon his face, added up a long column of figures that seemed to have no limit. Poor Dick! How suddenly the bright future appeared to have grown dark, and all hopes forever more dead.

At last Walter handed the paper to his father who first carefully adjusted his glasses, then slowly read it. A moment later he looked up and smiled, shaking his head, remarked with a grin:

"Well, Dick, I'm afraid you won't go to school this year, for the mare's board and your time takes every dollar you've got."

Dick was silent, for he knew he could do nothing since he was under age, and the farmer really had boarded the mare for three years. But his spirit was not broken, and he was far from being conquered.

"I will find a way out," he said, in determined silence, and raising his eyes, he answered calmly:

"I expected as much as this, in fact, it only equals the treatment I have always received at your hands. I understand this scheme perfectly, and I am sorry for you—sorry from the bottom of my heart that a man should stoop so low as to rob a boy. But I bear you no ill-will, for I know all, and yet I am willing to forget all, since I am to leave the shelter of your roof for good and all."

The boy's words cut the man, hard and mean though he was, to the quick. He winced, and was silent, but not for long. Turning to Dick he asked with a leer:

"And where will you go when you leave me without a single dollar in your pocket. You won't find many to take you in and give you a home."

Our hero smiled.

"I shall go to work and earn the money with which I hope to fit myself to face the world," he answered, proudly. "And I shall not fail. I never yet made up my mind to do a thing without succeeding. And now, if you will permit me, I will go to my room. I believe I have earned my supper and my night's shelter. Good-night, may you sleep well."

With these words he left father and son alone together, and

for the very first time in their lives they were both ashamed of their own conduct.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

Poor Dick! He did not close his weary eyes in sleep that night, for his disappointment was too keen, too sharp. To think that after all his hopes and plans, he should have failed. Oh, it was too bad!

Who could blame him if in the first few bitter hours, a great hot tear would now and then roll down his cheek, while his lips quivered pitifully.

"And I expected to do so much in the next two years," he said sadly to himself, looking out through the one small window at the clear, cold autumn moon, that floated in the heavens. "And now—now, I am as poor as ever!"

He bowed his head for the first time in all his brave young life, utterly hopeless, and then he started up, a sharp cry breaking from his lips, for a sudden idea darted like a flash of fire through his brain.

"No, no, I can't do that!" he said, hoarsely trying to fight against the thought. "Oh, it would seem like selling a dear, true friend, who had aided me, and I had repaid her with base ingratitude."

For he had for a moment thought of selling Princess Bonnie in order to carry out his cherished plans, but it seemed so heartless, so wicked, that he gave up the idea at once. What! sell her, the beautiful creature whose intelligence was almost human. Part with the only thing upon earth, who really and truly loved him. No, no, he could not, he would not do it.

Then he suddenly thought of sweet Hope White, and his heart softened. She loved him, God bless her, and she would never forsake him.

"If I only knew of someone who would buy Princess Bonnie and keep her for me until I was able to buy her back, I should not feel so mean about it," he muttered. "But as it is, I am all at sea."

He racked his brain trying to think, but every man with whom he might possibly leave her, would not sell her back to him again. In the first place they would not give him one half what she was worth, and then how would they treat her?

So upset and nervous did he become that he arose from his sleepless pillow, and slipping softly from the room, went to the stable where his pet mare was comfortably crunching her oats.

A soft, low whinny of delight greeted him, and a velvet nose was rubbed against his arm. The boy wound both arms about her neck, while a few hot tears fell from his eyes.

"Ah, Bonnie, my beauty, how you do love me!" he whispered, and the mare, as if understanding all he said, neighed softly.

For some time he stood there in silence, his arm about her neck, and she rubbing her head against him. The sweet scent of the hay in the lofts above floated to him, and the restless moving about of the cows was not an unpleasant sound. It

was so quiet, so still out there, and every dumb beast was so safely sheltered from the night and cold. They had roofs to cover them—aye! they had homes while he was homeless.

"Oh, beauty it is hard to be homeless and friendless both," he murmured. "And you, ah, how you would hate me if you knew what was in my mind only a little while ago. Poor as I am, lonely as I am, I know you would far rather be with me on a bed of straw with the coarsest of fare than be owned by the richest man in all the world. And yet I thought of parting with you for money in order to gratify my ambition. How you trust me, Princess Bonnie, how you trust me!"

And so she did. It was strange to see how the animal loved him, seeming to understand every word that came from his lips. And she was, as he said, the only thing in the wide world that loved him so faithfully. Even the young girl he was so fond of, could not have that same loyal affection. In a few years, when time had changed the maiden into a woman, she would then be able to know and understand love, but not now.

Suddenly he again started, a bright smile breaking over his face.

"At last," he muttered. "At last. He will take you, Princess Bonnie, and you will live like a queen until I can once more claim you. I will see him to-morrow morning early, and there will be no more barriers before me. Thank Heaven for the thought!"

After seeing that the mare was all right he went back to the house, and throwing himself, dressed as he was, across his poor bed, soon sank into a peaceful sleep. He was young, and in youth there are few clouds so heavy that the sunshine can't get through. Then he had found a way out of his troubles, and all appeared bright and fair.

He was up as early as ever the following morning and went about his work, saying nothing whatever of his intentions. But after breakfast and the work was done, he quietly made his way to the Pines where Richard Cadwell lived, and of the stately footman who answered his ring, asked permission to see the owner of the place.

He was not refused admittance, and while he sat in the big hall looking about him in wonder, he thought that he had never even read of such a magnificent place and he sighed, wondering if he would ever be the owner of such a grand old home.

Five minutes later the man returned and politely informed him that Mr. Cadwell had unknown to him, quietly taken his departure for New York over half an hour ago. So there was nothing left for poor Dick but to go away again, which he did, his heart like lead within his breast. It seemed that he was doomed to disappointment on every side, for the butler told him that none of the servants at the Pines could say when their master would return, for he never left word with them as to when he would come or go. His return was very uncertain and poor Dick returned to the farm, his eyes hot with unshed tears. Both he and the Princess Bonnie were now homeless and friendless.

He did not go to the house, but made his way to the barn. That was his nook of comfort as he always called it, and whenever the world seemed colder, harder than ever, and his pathway rougher than usual, he did, indeed, find comfort out there among the placid, large-eyed cows, and the satin-coated horses. Somehow those dumb friends appealed to him more

than the most of men with whom he was associated. For he knew they all loved him, and that it was an honest, pure love.

Animals of every description loved Dick. Stray dogs, fierce, wicked, dangerous, snapping at everybody else with whom they chanced to meet, would come to him and lick his hand. Horses so vicious that but very few could manage them, suddenly became gentle and submissive at the sound of his voice. It was wonderful to note the power he had over the animal world. Show me the man or woman, the boy or girl whom all dumb brutes and children love and trust, and I will show you a heart that is both brave and pure.

But when you hear a person speak harshly to either, and declare they are afraid of even a kitten, then I will show you whom to avoid. If you have a friend who vows he hates dogs beware of that friend; don't trust him; don't pin your faith to him, for the day will surely come when you will rue it. And when you hear a girl utter an affected scream simply because a harmless kitten springs playfully into her lap, my boy, look out for her. It will be just as well if you begin to make your Sunday night calls at the home of the girl where poor tabby has a warm, snug corner by the fire. She is the girl for you.

Dick indeed found comfort with his beloved Princess Bonnie, and he stroked the velvet nose fondly. The dainty mare seemed to understand what he meant when he whispered to her that they were both homeless and friendless, for there was a world of sympathy in her bright eyes. Still she could not comfort him entirely, and with a deep sigh, he left her alone and wended his way to the house—the house within whose walls he had never known one hour's happiness.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW FRIEND.

Dick was indeed sick with despair. It seemed to him as though fate would not let him succeed in any undertaking, no matter what it might be. The walk back to the farm, which he must soon leave, and which had been the only home he had ever known since he left the Orphan's Home, was longer than the trip to The Pines. Then he had been in the best of spirits, his heart was light, and every cloud seemed to have been swept away from his pathway forever.

"I don't honestly know what to do," he said, despairingly, suddenly halting in the middle of the road, his head bowed, his young face grave and drawn. "I hardly think I deserve such a fate, for what have I ever done to deserve it? I have worked faithfully, aye, I have been a perfect slave for the roof that covered me, the bite I ate, and this is my reward. Men whom Farmer Jones paid good wages took no interest whatever in his work, and the moment the hour to stop work struck, they would not do another stroke. But I—I took as much interest in my labors as though the farm belonged to me. Well, it is usually the way. Those who serve well and faithfully, receive the least thanks."

He stood for some moments in silence, too heavy-hearted to move on, and then the beauty of the clear, crisp autumn

morning appealed to him. A new hope sprang to life within his breast, for how could he fail, he asked himself. No great battle was ever won without a hard, hard fight. He was young, and life stretched out before him. Others had overcome the barriers that blocked the way, why then should not he?

"I will succeed!" he breathed, his eyes glowing, his nostrils dilating like those of his beloved Princess Bonnie. "I will not be downed! There are a hundred ways open before me, and I am young yet. It may be that I shall be delayed for a few years, but then I am young, and I can afford to wait. There may be some kind friend of whom I do not dream, for such things have happened. I ought to be ashamed of myself for giving up for even a moment."

The sun shone brightly over his head, and the bare, brown fields took on a new beauty. He threw his head back, and walked briskly on to the farm, bravely determined to face the future without flinching.

"I've been thinking since you went out, Dick," he said, slowly, avoiding the boy's eyes, "and since you seem to be so set on going to school, I'll make you an offer. I don't suppose you'll do it, but maybe you'll look at it in the right light. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take that mare off your hands. Of course, she won't be much good to me, but I can sort of work her in for a third horse, you know, in haying and in the spring work. I can't afford to give you much, for it's money out of my pocket; good money, too. However, I'm anxious to help you, since you're trying to help yourself. Now, what's the smallest price you'll take for her?"

He did not notice the strange expression that came into Dick's eyes, and the boy's face was very sober as he answered calmly:

"I leave that to you, sir. Surely, you ought to know what such a mare is worth. You have lived longer than I have, and you have had more experience than I have with horses. You may set the price."

Nathan Jones grinned, and his eyes twinkled greedily. He smacked his lips once or twice as if rolling a very sweet morsel under his tongue. Then he drawled:

"Well, as I said before, I can't afford to give you much, but I'll do the best I can. The critter will be dead property on my hands; still I can work her in for extra work. She'll eat her head off, too, during the winter, but I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars for her."

Dick's lip curled.

"You are too generous, sir," he replied, half mockingly. "How can you do so well by me? Now here is my answer—one hundred and fifty thousand dollars would not buy Princess Bonnie—aye! before I would let her pass into your hands I would kill her! Your offer is an insult, and if the worst comes to the worst, we can starve together!"

The farmer's face turned a dull red.

"You are an ungrateful puppy, sir, that's what you are," he retorted, "and I'll not have you under my roof another hour! Take your mare and get out this very instant or I'll set the dogs on you!"

"You'll have to do that, Mr. Jones, for I am only too glad

to go," our hero replied. "I've had nothing from you that I did not earn and I expect nothing. Go, I win, and I shall never cross your threshold again."

Dick turned away without a word and started for the barn where his mare was, the farmer following behind him.

"I'll see that you don't take anything that don't belong to you," the latter growled. "And why, if there ain't the minister!"

It was true. The Rev. Joseph Cornell was driving slowly down the hill towards the farm house. He drew up before the gate just as Dick came out of the barn leading Princess Bonnie, all his worldly possessions wrapped in a small bundle and slung over his shoulder.

"Good-morning, parson, how be you?" the farmer said agreeably, hastening to meet the newcomer.

The clergyman answered him kindly, but briefly, and then turned his attention to Dick.

"Why, my boy, what is the meaning of this?" he asked in his pleasant voice. "You look as if you were going on a long journey?"

"And so I am, sir," our hero replied with a bright smile. "I do not know how long it will be, but time will tell."

"Why are you going forth in this manner?" the kind man questioned, a perplexed look coming over his face. "You won a goodly sum of money the other day at the race, so I am told. Why not use some of it to present a better appearance?"

"Because I have used every dollar of it to pay a debt," was the clear response while the farmer moved about uneasily, "and I have to begin all over again. This dear, noble horse," patting his mare's neck lovingly, "won me money enough to accomplish my object in life. We forgot, however, that her board for three years had to be paid."

"Ah, I understand now," and the clergyman looked hard at the farmer. "You are both homeless and penniless. Be kind enough to fasten Princess Bonnie behind and get in here beside me. You are going home with me until we decide what to do. Brother Jones," rather severely, "I will call again to see you. My present visit was not of very great importance. Good-morning."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST HOPE GONE.

When Nathan Jones saw Dick drive away with the Rev. Joseph Cornell, he felt smaller than he had felt for many a day. He was very angry, too, but he managed to hide it.

"Drat the boy, anyway!" he muttered, shaking his fist after the pair. "He's always getting me into trouble, and I wish to Heaven I'd never bothered with him. Of course, the minister had to come just at the wrong time. Now, he'll give me a lecture about the sin of being greedy, the very next time I see him. Well, I only took what belonged to me."

"Got it in the neck, that time, didn't you, dad?" remarked Walter, who was near by, and had witnessed the entire affair. "The old chap gave you a look that would freeze a stone."

"Shut up!" growled his father, glaring at him savagely. "You are the one that started the whole business, and I have to face the music. Confound you, I have half a mind to take that whip to you, big as you are!"

"Well, you were pretty well paid for facing the music," retorted the son, "and as you give me the credit for putting up the whole business, what's the matter with giving me a part of the money? I have honestly (?) earned half of it, I think. You had to face the music, to be sure, but then you didn't have to dance, so hand over part of the dough."

"I'll make you dance, you young sassbox, you!" roared the farmer, making a grab for the large whip that hung on the wall. "I'll learn you that I'm your father, sir."

"I have learned it long ago," Master Walter sung out, but he was careful now to put a goodly distance between himself and his father, for when Nathan Jones was fully aroused, he was an awful man despite the fact that he was a "pillar" and deacon in the church.

"They're all a bad lot," the "pillar," that upheld kindness (?) and generosity (?), remarked, wiping his brow with a huge, red handkerchief. "And all they want is my money. But I'll fix them. Not a durned cent will that cub of mine ever get, if he dares sass me again."

Not very choice language for the pious Deacon Jones to use, and regarding his own son, too. But as my young readers must know, even a "pillar" sometimes loses his temper.

Meanwhile Dick, with his new friend, was slowly driving homeward, and as they rode along through the clear, fresh air, in response to the clergyman's earnest questioning, the boy told the story of his life from the very hour that he entered the Jones farm house up to now. The kindly man listened in silence, every now and then gravely shaking his head.

When Dick had finished they had reached the parsonage. Two fresh young faces were at the window, and as they saw who their guest was, both disappeared as if by magic. One to hide itself in the shadows of the room, the other to appear at the door, which was flung open with a bang.

"Oh, Dick, how glad I am to see you!" Della cried, giving him her hand. "Come right in this very minute, for Hope will be as pleased as I am."

"We have a new addition to our family, my dear, in fact two of them," her father laughed. "Give them both a most royal welcome."

"Indeed, I will," the girl answered eagerly. "Dick, you are going to be my brother now, and oh! what a tyrant of a sister you will find me!"

"I do not fear you," our hero replied, his eyes dim, and a big lump in his throat, for he had not expected such a kindly welcome.

"But first of all let us take care of Princess Bonnie," he said, laughingly. "I never allow any hands save mine to touch her. You know we are the best of friends, and I really

believe she would not eat her oats if anyone else gave them to her."

"She would eat them from a certain pair of fair hands that I know of, I am sure she would, and you know it," the merry girl retorted, with a wicked look. "But go on and make haste for Hope and I have been trying our hand at cake-making. We want you to try a piece, and—we both pity you from the bottom of our hearts, we do."

He led the mare to the neat stables, and in a very few moments was back in the house with the kind friends who made him feel at home at once. There he saw the fair girl whose sweet face he was destined to see every day for some time to come.

That day was one long to be remembered by Dick, and in the evening after tea, the clergyman requested a short interview with him in his study.

"I know your ambitions, my boy," he said kindly, "and I am going to help you. Now, I am not a sporting man as you must see," smilingly; "but I intend to indulge in a bit of it for a time. Will you sell me Princess Bonnie for any sum you may need or wish, allowing her to remain with me here? Whenever you wish, you may buy her back, and I promise you that I will take the best care of her."

Dick's eyes filled with tears, and for an instant he could not speak. He understood perfectly well why the good man made him that offer. He did not wish to hurt his feelings by offering him the money outright, so he took that way.

"You are too kind, sir," he finally managed to falter huskily, "and I feel as if I ought not to accept it."

"That is a very foolish way to look at it, my boy," was the grave reply. "You must accept it. I insist upon it!"

So it was all arranged. The clergyman paid over to him a neat sum for the mare, and also found him a suitable school in New York State. Within two weeks he was ready to start, and while he was overjoyed at the prospect of accomplishing his object, he was sorry to leave the kind friends and the only happy home he had ever known.

The last evening spent there was never forgotten. He was to go away in the early morning, and while all were merry and gay, yet a sadness hung over all, for parting ever brings a cloud over the fairest ray of sunshine.

He slept well that night, and was up bright and early the next morning. Everything was in readiness. His trunk stood in the hall all packed, even to a huge cake that Della had baked for him, and which she declared would kill anyone within a week. He had put on his overcoat, and just before he drew on his gloves, he went to get the money from the nook where he always kept it hidden. Suddenly he started back with a sharp cry of surprise, for the money was not there!

CHAPTER XXI.

FIRE!

For one moment Dick thought he must surely be mistaken or dreaming, and he searched the tiny cupboard again, this

time more thoroughly than before. But no, he was not mistaken. It was not there.

Faint, sick, dizzy, he reeled away, wondering if it were not some horrible dream from which he would soon awaken with a sigh of relief. Oh! what evil fate was it that so persistently pursued him?

Ten years seemed to have been added to his age as he went slowly down the stairs, and he walked like an old man. The clergyman looked up at him in surprise.

"What is the matter, my boy?" he asked, going quickly toward him, for he knew that something had happened. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"It's gone," the boy answered, hollowly, sinking into a chair as he spoke. "The—the money is gone!"

His friends stared at him, not thoroughly understanding him, and then the clergyman spoke again, this time very much excited:

"You mean that your money is gone? The money you received for Princess Bonnie?"

Dick could not speak for the big lump that stuck in his throat, but he simply nodded his head.

"You must be mistaken, oh, Dick, are you sure that you have looked well for it?" Della cried.

"I kept it in the little cupboard in my room," the boy answered, faintly. "I was the only one who knew where it was kept, and I am not mistaken in the fact that it is gone."

"Then we must search high and low for it," the clergyman said. "Come, girls, both of you go over the house and look well into every nook and corner. There is no time to be lost."

Every corner of the old-fashioned parsonage was searched, but not a sign of the missing money was to be found. It had disappeared as completely as though the ground had opened and swallowed it up; and the strangest part of it all, there was no one to suspect. Old Martha, the faithful servant, who had been with them for years, was not to be even spoken of, for the good man would as soon have suspected his own child.

At last they gave up in despair, and sat facing each other in the pleasant sitting room where they had spent so many pleasant hours together.

"I can't understand it," poor Dick said, his lips white, his eyes hopeless. "Not a living person knew where I had hidden it, and now it is gone!"

"Well, my boy, it cannot be helped now," the clergyman answered, with a sigh. "The only thing for us is to wait a few days and see if we can find any clues. Then if we fail, we can try another plan. I am sorry you cannot go to-day; but if you think best, I am willing to advance another sum so that you may go on."

Dick's face flushed hotly.

"Not for the world," he replied in a low voice. "I am going to stay right here until I hunt down the thief, and I will not fail!"

"I am glad to hear you say that for it shows that you have not yet given up in despair," the clergyman said, with

a smile. "I greatly feared that this last blow would prove too much for you, but I am glad to see that it has not."

"You have paid me once for Princess Bonnie, sir, and that is quite enough," our hero remarked, with a ring of sadness in his voice. "And I shall have no peace either day or night until I find the coward who robbed me. If I never go a day to school I shall find him, rest assured of that!"

And so he would. While his heart was almost broken by his great loss and his courage well nigh crushed out, yet he would not for a single moment falter nor rest until he had found the guilty one or ones, whichever it might be. But he realized that he had a hard task before him, and he could not help sighing.

Before retiring to his room that night, as he sat alone in the dusk, a soft little hand was thrust gently into his own, while a sweet voice whispered:

"Dear Dick, I wish I might do something to help you. You do not know how my heart aches for you."

"And so you can help me, Hope," he answered, pressing his lips to the rosy fingers, "by giving me your love and friendship. That will be more to me than anything the world might give me. It is a gift I prize more highly than gold or diamonds."

"You know you are sure of my love, Dick," was her simple answer, and he was well satisfied with it.

Restless, feverish and broken were his dreams that night. He was in constant trouble, always in danger, and yet just at the very last moment Hope, like a sweet, white angel, always came to save him.

Suddenly he was awakened by the sound of excited voices, the patter of feet running wildly about the house, and springing from the bed, he had reason enough even in his half-dazed condition to partly dress himself. Then he ran down the stairs only to be met by the girls and the clergyman, who half frantic with fright did not know what to do. The moment they saw him, they made a wild rush for him.

"Oh, Dick," they panted. "The barns, the barns!"

Rushing to the front door he flung it wide open and rushed out into the night. There before him, red, fierce, threatening, stood the snug barn a mass of flames that shooting heavenward seemed to defy the power of man to stop them.

His first thought was of Princess Bonnie. Heavens, but she must be saved. It was sure death to go into that roaring, seething furnace, but he could not, he would not let that beautiful animal perish.

He sprang toward the heavy doors that were already in flames. In vain did his friends shout to him to come back, but he never heeded them. He was bent upon saving his horse.

One single instant he paused and looked wildly about him. Then his eyes fell upon a heavy beam that lay close by, and seizing it with one mighty blow he battered down the doors. A cloud of black smoke gushed forth, almost blinding him, but he bounded within, and ran straight to Princess Bonnie's stall.

"Bonnie!" he called, softly, and the mare ceased her wild rearing and plunging at the sound of that beloved voice.

A second later an extra woolen blanket was wound about

her head, and still talking to her in that soothing voice, she followed him out of the stall like a dog. Her own blanket protecting her satiny sides from the shower of sparks that fell like red hot snowflakes about and above her.

But would horse and boy ever live to reach the open night outside? It was something awful in there, and yet on and on they fought—one fearing, the other trusting.

Those outside waited with beating hearts and silent prayers upon their lips. Ah, how long each passing instant seemed to them, and how rapidly the flames gained headway! It was almost impossible for any human being to live in such an atmosphere; yet they hoped and prayed. Would Heaven answer those prayers? Alas! There was a sudden, sullen roar, a mighty crash, and then the building, every timber still ablaze, tottered, and fell like a groaning, living thing.

CHAPTER XXII.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

A cry of horror went up from the group who stood breathlessly watching the mad leaping flames, for by this time the fire had been seen for miles around, and every man in and about Burrville had hurried to the rescue. One glance sufficed to reveal that they were too late, for no power upon earth could save the minister's stables.

Those present did not know that Dick had entered the burning building, and they were surprised at the cries of horror and dismay that came from the lips of the clergyman and the two girls, for he was a rich man and could well afford the loss of his property. Of course they realized that his kind heart was filled with sorrow at the thought of the unfortunate animals within that fiery furnace meeting with such an awful death, and yet he would never have allowed any man to risk his own life to save them. No wonder they turned their gaze from the flames to look at him.

"Dick!" he panted, hoarsely. "Dick! He is in there!"

A sudden chorus of horror greeted him, for now they understood, and the awful, awful fate of the boy made everyone of them grow cold and shudder.

"My God! the boy is dead then!" a man's voice cried, sounding queer and unearthly above the roar of the flames. "He must be, for no human being could live in that pit of fire! and we can't save him! Great Heavens, we can't even get his body out!"

A groan went round—a deep groan of utter despair—and then a shrill, piercing shriek in a girl's voice arose above it—the sweet voice of Hope White, now so harsh and strained that not one there recognized the musical tones of the fair girl.

"Dead!" she wailed, her slender form swaying from side to side like a reed in a strong wind. "Dead! Oh, Dick—Dick!"

And then, as that beloved name died upon her white lips, she sank fainting to the ground, her beautiful face whiter than it ever would be again even when she was lying in her coffin.

Della knelt down beside her with a cry of alarm, and raised the bonnie, helpless head in her arms. She feared she was dead, too, for she was so frail, so fair, so fragile—more like a flower than a flesh and blood mortal.

"She is dead, too!" she sobbed. "The shock has killed her. Oh, Hope, my dearest sister Hope, open your eyes and look at me! Speak to me, Hope—speak to me!"

But no answering glance came from those closed eyes, over which the snowy lids were closed—no word left the ashen lips. It did indeed seem that the girl who loved brave Dick "I Will" so dearly was dead.

Just then the clergyman interfered. He too knelt beside the prostrate form lying upon the frozen ground and shook his head sadly.

"We must get her into the house without further delay," he said slowly, his voice husky with emotion. "For——"

He never finished the sentence, for a sudden wild shout filled the air—a shout of joy, wonder, so glad and triumphant that it caused him to spring to his feet again; and it came from many throats—a shout that he never forgot to his dying day, for there before him, just emerged from the fiery ruins beneath which he believed both brave Dick and Princess Bonnie to be buried, they stood, the woolen blankets that were wrapped about them, burning in a dozen different places.

He could scarce believe the evidence of his own eyes, and that picture never left him. He lived to be an old, old man, and after his days of toil were ended, and he sat upon the vine-wreathed porch of his house, his grandchildren clustered about his knee, he would tell them again and again of how their father saved the noble mare he loved so well, at the risk of his own life. They never wearied of hearing it, and it was a pretty scene, the saintly looking old man with his child-like faith and trust, waiting for the hour when he should join the wife of his youth beyond the River of Gladness, the silent little ones, open-eyed, awed, eagerly listening to every word. Ah, me, such scenes are only too rare in this busy, cold world of ours.

A dozen men rushed forward, a dozen pairs of hands were outstretched to catch the badly burned boy ere he fell to the ground, while the mare was quickly led away to a place of safety.

Fortunately Dr. Spencer was present, and he was able to administer to the sufferer. Dick was almost overcome, but he managed to gasp out ere he fainted:

"I—can save—no more. Tell—Hope I—am alive. I——"

Faint and low as his voice was, it reached the ears of the girl, and brought her back to life once more. She opened her eyes just as they bore him into the parsonage, and knew that he lived.

And oh! what a prayer of praise and thankfulness went up

from her heart when they told her so. But alas! she little knew how near death he really was.

Yes, it was true. Brave, noble Dick "I Will," was indeed so severely burned, that at first Dr. Spencer shook his head gravely. He never left his bedside all that night long, and tears stood in his eyes, strong man though he was, as he witnessed the agony of the sufferer. But he bore it like a hero, and the kind-hearted physician bent over him, whispering huskily:

"My boy, you should have lived in the olden times, for you are the material that heroes were made of. You will pull through in spite of all. Another boy would have died."

And so they fought the grim battle—relentless Death and Dick "I Will."

Night after night the boy ground his teeth in silent agony, vowing that he would live, he could not, would not die.

"I will live!" he muttered. "For I cannot die! I must live for Hope!"

Never did a suffering youth have a tenderer, gentler nurse than the girl who watched over him day and night. The mere sight of her sweet face was better than medicine, so the doctor laughingly declared, and when the fight was ended, and Dick out of danger, he realized that but for her, strong though he was, he could never have recovered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A HAPPY SURPRISE ALL AROUND.

It was indeed a happy day when our hero was able to go to the diningroom for the first time. In honor of his recovery, Della planned a little surprise for him, and as he entered the bright, warm room, leaning a trifle heavily upon the clergyman's arm, he was greeted by a merry burst of laughter, for there stood not only Hope and Della, but also his friend, Frank Spencer.

"Welcome back to life and happiness, my dear old boy," the latter said gayly, but with a queer choking in his voice, and a dimness in his eyes, usually not there. "It seems good to see you about once more, I can tell you that."

"And it seems more than good to see you again, Frank," Dick answered tremulously. "It pays me for all I have suffered. I believe I would go through it all again for the sake of such a moment as this. A few true friends make the whole world to me."

"This is indeed a happy moment for us all," the clergyman said, very softly, "and to-night let us forget that there is such a thing in the world as care or sorrow. Let us forget all pain, all suffering, all wrongs, and forgive those who have wronged us as fully and freely as we hope He will forgive us for our transgressions. To-night we will pray for those who have sinned against us. Let this little repast ever be re-

membered by us as a feast of peace and good will toward friend and foe alike. Friends, gather about the board."

In silence they sat down, and after a few simple words of grace, in which the good man earnestly thanked God for the recovery of one who was like a child of his own flesh and blood, the pleasant, ever-to-be-remembered dinner began. The solemn atmosphere, made so at first by the clergyman's words, quickly gave place to a mirth and cheerfulness. Merry laughter and lightly spoken words, ringing out upon the night, caused the passers-by to look wistfully at the bright eyes, and then hurry on with a sigh, at the thought of others being so happy while their lives were filled with woe.

Fate had indeed blessed those five people, who were gathered about that well-spread table. Life stretched out before the two brave youths, the fair, pure maidens, beautiful and bright. To be sure there had been clouds, but those same clouds had drifted away. And sitting there, facing each other, laughing, jesting, feasting, four young hearts throbbed faster as the tiny god of love touched them with his sweet-tipped arrow. Ah, cupid, sly, yet ever welcomed guest, although your presence is not seen by human eyes, the human heart knows when you are nigh!

The good man whose life had been so clear, so white, so unblemished, he too was happy, and yet there was a sorrow in his kind heart—a shadow that he was forced to walk in alone, for there was no one to share with him. Still he was thankful that life was as rich as it was.

Suddenly there came a sharp peal at the bell, and the maid, after answering it, returned, saying:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"Did he not give you his card, Mary?" the clergyman asked, somewhat annoyed at being thus interrupted. "Strange that he did not do so. And did you not tell him that I was at dinner with a party of friends?"

"I told him that, sir," the maid answered. "And he said that he would join you if you did not wish to be disturbed."

The clergyman's brows contracted, while a ripple of laughter went round among the young people.

"He appears to be rather a peculiar person," and the good man was forced to smile in spite of himself.

"Do let him come in, papa; it will be such fun," Della pleaded, her bright eyes dancing with mischief. "Please—please let him come in, for to-night we are having such a good time, and it will be a regular lark."

"Daughter—daughter, do not let your merry spirits run away with you," the clergyman remarked in gentle reproof. "Mary," to the maid, "you may show the gentleman in. He will be our guest. And after you give him my message you may lay another plate at the table."

"Yes, sir," and she disappeared only to return a moment later, accompanied by the stranger.

The clergyman arose from his chair to greet the self-invited guest, extending his hand, saying cordially:

"You are welcome, friend, although I do not know your name. I——"

Here an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips, for the light from the rose-shaped lamp, falling full upon his fine

face and snow-white hair, revealed the fact that the self-invited guest was none other than Richard Cadwell, the wealthy owner of The Pines.

"Why, Mr. Cadwell, what a pleasant surprise," the delighted clergyman cried, wringing the other's hand cordially. "I did not dream that you were the gentleman who——"

"Was so prudent as to invite himself to dine with you," Richard Cadwell laughed gayly. "I must make you an apology for intruding thus, but the truth is I am here on a very pleasant errand."

"Sit down, my dear sir, and join us in our dinner," the clergyman said. "We shall rejoice with you, for it gives me happiness to see others happy."

What happened to change the once sad master of The Pines so? What sudden joy had come into his life that had the power to drive the expression of sorrow from his fine eyes, and give place to hope? It was marvelous.

He stepped around to the other side of the table where Dick was sitting, and laying one hand upon his shoulder, said slowly, proudly:

"My dear Mr. Cornell, allow me to introduce to you my only brother's son, heir to a large fortune left him by his late father. Young ladies, young sir, my nephew, Master Richard Cadwell, called after his fond uncle—myself."

Need I describe—nay, need I try to describe, for I cannot really describe it—the scene that followed. Never before did the walls of the old parsonage echo to such happy voices as on that eventful night. It was a long story, and the errand that took the owner of The Pines to New York. He had always felt strangely drawn to our hero, and the first time he ever saw him he noticed the striking resemblance he bore to his late brother, whose only child had been stolen when a mere babe. Going to Nathan Jones, he learned all he could about him, then to the Orphan's Home, and on to New York, where he obtained all the evidence needed. So lo and behold! we find our hero, brave Dick "I Will," no longer the homeless, friendless wanderer, but Richard Cadwell, heir to a fortune, the size of which caused the citizens of Burrville to open their eyes in amazement.

While congratulations were being offered, Hope bent down to pick up her handkerchief that had fallen to the floor. As she did so the clergyman suddenly uttered a sharp cry, then took a step forward, his face ghastly. The young girl was so startled that she could not speak, but only stood staring at him, her eyes wide open—her red lips parted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

UNMASKED.

Della heard her father's voice, and she, too, was frightened. Running to him, she laid one hand upon his arm, crying out:

"Papa, what is it? Are you ill?"

"No, no; I—I," and he sank panting into a chair, his face like marble—the great beads standing out upon his brow like drops of dew. "Hope, my child—come here."

The young girl obeyed him, wondering and half afraid, for she had never before seen the clergyman so affected. She came close to him while the others in the room looked on in silent amusement.

He held out one trembling hand.

"Let me—see your—your locket, my child."

Still wondering, Hope reached up, and, unclasping the slender golden chain from about her white throat, gave it into the eager hand stretched out to receive it. Attached to it was a small golden locket in the shape of a star curiously engraved. It was an odd, frail ornament—one that would be noticed at any time or place.

The clergyman's fingers trembled so that he could hardly hold it. Once, twice, thrice, he dropped it, and then setting his lips firmly, he pressed a spring so small that it could not be seen. The case flew open, and inside were two locks of hair, one a dark, rich brown, the other a bright gold.

A long, low quivering cry of joy burst from the clergyman's lips—a cry always remembered by those who heard it—a cry like that of a dreamer suddenly awakened from some horrible dream of torture and fright, and to whom the joy of awakening is the delight of Heaven—and letting the tiny toy fall to the floor, he sprang to Hope's side and caught her in his arms.

"At last!" he panted, half delirious with rapture. "At last my prayers are answered, oh, God! be praised! Look at me, child, look at me, for I am—your father!"

Again silence, but only for an instant. This time Della was the one to break the stillness. With a shout like a young savage, she danced about the room, crying out:

"I knew it, I knew it. I always felt it in my bones. I told you, Hope, that you seemed to be my sister from the very first time that I laid my eyes upon your dear face. Oh, but I could sing for a week without stopping, and dance, too. Come, come, papa, stop hugging Hope and tell us all about it, or I shall begin to get jealous."

"By this time they were all sufficiently composed to sit down and listen to the story. It was a strange tale, more like a story one reads, than a page from plain every day life.

"First of all tell me, how long have you had this locket, my child?" the clergyman asked, huskily.

"Ever since I can remember," Hope answered. "It is the first object I ever remember seeing, so I must have been very small. Sometimes they used to try to take it away from me, but I always cried and then they gave it up. It has been about my neck for years."

"The same," the clergyman said, with a sigh of relief and content. "Della, my child, where is your locket? Have you it about your throat?"

"Yes, papa, though why I wore it to-night I cannot say," the happy girl replied brightly, at the same time unclasping from about her neck and giving to him a locket exactly like Hope's. "Thank goodness I did, however."

"I am glad you did so," said the clergyman.

Then he opened the locket.

"This little locket contains a lock of your dear, dead mother's hair, and also one of my own," the clergyman went on, his voice tremulous with emotion. "See, they are just alike, the coils of gold in each, the lock of dark brown. Heaven has restored you to my arms, dear child, and when I had given up every hope of ever seeing you again. When you were a child your nurse disappeared with you one day, and that was the last time I saw you. We never could find the faintest trace of either, and we believed you were dead. The blow killed my dear wife. She pined and died at last of a broken heart. Ah, if she might only have lived to look upon the face of her beloved child again! But I must not rebel. Thy will be done, oh Lord, for Thou art indeed kind to me, Thy humble servant. My daughter," smiling half sadly, "you are just one year younger than your sister. Your birthdays come on the same day. Friends," turning to those assembled, "we have double cause for rejoicing this night. Ah, who shall say that life is not blessed, and earth a heaven of happiness?"

Such a happy night was never before known by any one of those gathered within the walls of the parsonage, and right merrily did they celebrate it in good, old-fashioned country style.

But there was more happiness.

In the midst of their pleasure came another ring at the bell. This time it was Hiram Gregg, the man of all work at the Jones' farm. He was accompanied by Walter Jones, who looked shame-faced enough.

The farm hand was evidently very angry, for his face was flushed, and he carried a heavy whip.

He led Walter up before the clergyman.

"Here he is, parson," were his first words, "and here's the money he stole from Dick there. I knowed he took it, and I jest followed him to-night and saw where he hid it, so I jest took this 'ere whip, and you kin see fur yourself. He's got to tell the truth, or I'll lick him so that his own dad won't know him. Why don't you lick him too, Dick?"

"No, he has been punished enough, Hiram," our hero answered. "Let him go. It may be a lesson to him and in the future be the means of making a man of him.

"I hope he will reform his ways."

Walter Jones was beaten at his own game, and only too glad to get out of the trap so easily. He went abroad very suddenly, and it was many years before he was seen in Burrville again, and Edith Cross lived and died an old maid.

She had been bitterly disappointed.

Reader, you know the rest as well as I do. There is no need for me to say more, save this: In a magnificent residence not far from The Pines, there is a sturdy youngster of three years, who says "I will," to everyone and everything,

and in the handsome dashing man known far and wide as a great criminal lawyer, whom he calls papa, we recognize our old friend, Dick "I Will." Thus the curtain is rung down upon one of life's dramas, and now comes the blessed peace and rest of perfect happiness.

THE END.

Read "LARRY OF THE LANTERN; or, THE SMUGGLERS OF THE IRISH COAST," by Howard Austin, which will be the next number (553) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE: All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 5, 7, 8, 10 to 13, 15 to 18, 20, 22, 25, 29 to 31, 34 to 36, 39, 42, 43, 48 to 50, 54, 55, 57, 60, 64, 68, 69, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 89, 94, 100, 109, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 163, 171, 179 to 181, 212, 265. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order, by return mail.

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Out To-day!

BERT, THE BROKER

—OR—

Making Money in Wall St.

By Harvey K. Ford

Begins in No. 743 of "HAPPY DAYS," issued December 25, 1908

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THINGS OF INTEREST.

A writer in a well-known household magazine has the following: "We descended into the basement, and there I saw one of the completest electric installations for housekeeping that it is possible to imagine. On the range were various electric appliances, with incandescent lamps and reflectors. Suppose you wish to cook some eggs. No need at M. Knapp's to boil them in water. You put them in a special oven, and when they are cooked, at the end of two or three minutes, the current is cut off and a bell rings to inform you that they are ready. If you are going to have roast fowl for dinner, you put it on the spit, turn on the current, and leave it to cook by itself, without troubling yourself in the least until the bell rings, in half an hour's time or so, when you will find that it has been well basted by means of a special apparatus and that it is done to a turn. The timing machine in connection with the electric current is simply an ordinary alarm clock transformed. Knowing that it requires so long for this or that article of food to cook, you merely have to set the machine to "go off" at a stated time, and are then free to occupy yourself with other duties. In another corner of this up-to-date kitchen, and on a circular table, I noticed a number of useful household machines, all worked by electricity, the motor being a tenth of a horsepower, with a flexible cardin attachable to any of the apparatus. These consisted of a little churn for making fresh butter, a mincing machine, a coffee grinder, a whisk for making mayonnaise sauce, another for preparing whipped cream, a knife polisher and a pastry mixer. Here, again, you can set the machinery in motion and attend to other duties while the work is being performed."

In Syria and Palestine, from the beginning of April until October there is practically no rain, yet in July the fields teem with a vigorous growth of watermelons, tomatoes, cucumbers, etc., all flourishing without artificial watering, although at that time no rain has fallen for many weeks. In fact, the Syrian peasant, from the moment his seed has been sown, prays that no rain may fall. During the period of growth of a crop the surface of the soil to a depth of six or eight inches is perfectly dry and loose. Below this surface layer will be found moist soil, in which the roots extend and grow vigorously. In this moist subsoil plants continue to grow until late autumn. When the crop is removed in the autumn the rains commence, and the land is ploughed after each heavy rain as soon as the soil begins to dry. Two primary objects are kept in view in ploughing—to furnish a favorable surface for taking up all the water and to prevent its upward evap-

oration from the subsoil. The great point is to keep the upper six inches of soil perfectly loose and friable, so that the moisture from below is not drawn upward and lost in evaporation, but does not ascend higher than the compact subsoil that is not broken up by the plough. For this reason the ploughing is shallow, averaging from four to six inches in depth. When the time for sowing the seed arrives the land is ploughed to a depth of about six inches and the seed is sown from an arrangement attached to the plough, falls on the damp subsoil, and is covered by the soil closing over behind the ploughshare. From this time the upper stratum of loose soil prevents the escape of moisture upward beyond the wet subsoil on which the seeds rest, and into which their roots, after the process of germination, spread.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

"Send me up two bags of oats and a bale of hay." Voice—All right, sir. Who is it for? "The horse, of course, you idiot!"

Church—I see Mrs. Bensonhurst has raised a Merry Widow hat at last. Flatbush—I don't see how on earth she did it; they've only got an acre of ground.

"You certainly wouldn't marry a girl for her money, would you, Tom?" "Of course not; neither would I have the heart to let her become an old maid because she happened to be well off."

"Yes, your reverence, our Johnnie is a wonder. He can play cards, bowl and cuss like a trooper." "Can he say his prayers?" "No; he's too little for that."

The barber paused in his fretwork operations. "Will you have a close shave, sir?" he asked. "It looks like it," returned the victim, moodily. "At present the odds against me getting out of this chair alive seem very heavy, indeed."

"I've got you down for a couple of tickets. We're getting up a raffle for a poor man of our neigh—" "None for me, thank you. I wouldn't know what to do with a poor man if I won him."

Niece—Uncle, they say that there are more marriages of blondes than of brunettes. Why is it, I wonder? Uncle Singleton (a confirmed bachelor)—H'm! Naturally, the light-headed ones go first.

Caller—I see you keep chickens. What breed do you consider the best? Suburbanite—It's hard to tell. I notice, though, that more of my white Wyandottes are stolen than any other kind.

Manager—Sir, your performance of Hamlet is the very worst ever represented behind the footlights. If there had been any money in the house I should have been bound in honor to return it at the doors. As it is, several friends have sent in and peremptorily ordered me to remove their names from the free list.

Congressman Reeder of the Sixth District tells this story on himself: Meeting an old German farmer in Lincoln County he extended his hand, saying: "My name is Reeder. I'm a candidate for Congress." "Well," replied the farmer, "I hope you make a better one than we got now."

How My Life Was Saved

By COL. RALPH FENTON.

Puff, puff! swing, swing! puff, puff! Almost had the swift swaying of the railroad train banished my mind to the "Land of Nod"—that happy land of dreams and rest—when the sudden stoppage of the carriages, and the noisy opening of the door of my compartment, called me back to things mundane—called me back with a start, and a keen, sudden interest in the traveler, who, politely noticing my presence with a nod, proceeded to throw off his heavy coat and scarf—for it was a cool day, and warm wrappings were in vogue.

Surely that tall, stately figure was—or rather had been some years before—very familiar to me; and my heart began to beat more quickly as I held myself ready to greet the dear old college chum who for four years had shared my room, and my every plan and thought, in the quaint old German university where both had been sent to "finish" our education—he an Englishman, I an American.

We had been like brothers in our deep attachment, and for some months after our departure to our respective homes had corresponded faithfully, until one day came a short, incoherent letter from Harry Lacy, saying that he was married, had quarreled with his father and elder brother, had enlisted as a private soldier, and was just starting for India with his regiment.

Would send me his address there as soon as he arrived. But that address never came, and half a dozen letters I sent him, under cover to his father, were returned to me unopened (my address being on the envelope.)

Neither did I receive any reply to a direct appeal for news of my beloved friend.

And so, for ten years now, I had lost all trace of Harry, and finally had come to mourn for him as dead.

And now here he was before me, evidently well-to-do in the world, stately, proud as ever— But, stay, was I mistaken after all? The form was Harry's, the brown eyes, the handsome face, were Harry's, but the hair—his was brown, and this man's was white as snow—a startling contrast to the bright, youthful head it crowned.

No, it could not be my dear old chum; and yet, even that impatient flinging back of the straggling locks from his forehead was a trick of Harry's.

Fascinated, my eyes kept straying furtively to the stranger's face, and after awhile I became aware that I was myself the object of a similar secret attention on his part.

"Why," I asked myself, "can it really be he, after all? But surely he would know me; my hair is as it used to be."

And then I remembered that when we parted my complexion was fair and my face smooth, and now I was bronzed, and my face well hidden by beard and mustache. I did not want to claim acquaintance with a stranger, yet I was determined to end my uncertainty. In my pocket-book I had carried for years a little photograph of my old friend, given me on the day we parted, and taking it out, I managed, as if by accident, to let it fly from my hand and alight on the seat near the mysterious stranger. As I had anticipated, common politeness led him to pick it up, to return it to me; it was an anxious moment for me, but only a moment, and then—it would have done the heart of any old cynic good to have seen the joyful embrace and glistening eyes of two strong men who were not ashamed to give full sway to their love for each other, and their emotion at so unexpected a reunion.

That night I slept not, as I had intended, at a hotel, but in the beautiful old family mansion of the Lacys, to which my friend had fallen heir during our long separation—to which he joyfully led me, introducing me to his lovely young wife as "the long-lost heart-brother she had heard of so often."

"And now, Phil," said my dear old friend, "come, before it is too dark, and let me make you acquainted with Tonka; he has heard my voice before now, and is fretting because I have not gone to him yet. Tonka is a great pet of ours, let me tell you, and you owe him something, too, old fellow—'and you love me'—for but for Tonka I had not been here now. I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

He led the way to a small apartment, built like a conservatory, with glass sides, and having even on this cool day a tropical temperature. There were no flowers in it, however, only two small trees growing in boxes, and some rocks and stumps scattered about.

The moment Harry opened the door, a small, dark object made a flying leap to his shoulder, and nestled up against his cheek in perfect contentment, while he gently stroked its beautiful gray fur. It was a slender, fairy-like little thing, and its sparkling eyes surveyed me with some curiosity, not unmixed with uneasiness.

"This is Tonka, Phil, the friend who has done me the most signal service of any, yourself not excepted. He is a mongoose—in other words, an East Indian ichneumon. This room is his especial property, and I believe he includes me also under that heading. Well, he earned the right, certainly. Bed-time, Tonka!"

He carried the little creature to a hole scooped out in a stump, and it obediently crept in, and curled itself down, looking wistfully after its beloved master as he closed the door.

"And now, Phil," said my friend, as we settled down the next day for a quiet talk, "I will tell you the story of my life since I parted with you in Germany."

"You will remember how I used to talk to you of the overbearing dispositions of my father and elder brother, and the consequent discomforts of my home, so it was with no joyful anticipations that I turned my face homewards."

"I expected that the time would drag heavily, for my father had refused to procure me a commission in the army, as I desired, and there seemed nothing for me to do but to idle away my time like other young men about town, a thing I always detested. But I found an absorbing interest from the very first day I set foot in the house, and then time took to himself golden wings. My little sister had a governess, a young lady whose father had been a wealthy merchant, but had lost everything at one blow, and died from the shock, leaving his only child a penniless orphan."

"My father was looking for a suitable teacher for my sister, and Alice Scott happened to be thrown in his way—providentially, as I now think, but most unhappily, as I once thought, for things looked awfully dark for awhile, as you will see."

"To cut a long story short, I loved Miss Scott from the very day I met her, and very soon I saw that, for once in our lives, my brother and I thought alike. He was very quiet about it, and my father never suspected the plot his favorite son and heir was hatching under his very nose. Had he done so he would not have allowed Miss Alice to be so persecuted, for he liked and respected her, although, on account of her poverty and present position, he would never have consented to his son's marrying her."

"One day I told Alice 'the old, old story,' and to my intense happiness found it was not told in vain. But the path before us was by no means smooth. I did not dare confess my love for Alice, knowing it would be the signal for my disinheritance, and I was wholly dependent upon my father, so Alice reluctantly consented to keep our engagement a secret for the present."

"Meantime, jealousy at my evident favor in Alice's eyes made my brother still bolder in his advances, and finally Alice left our house and went to reside with her aunt. Here my brother followed, and worried her so much that she at last

yielded to my entreaties, and we were quietly married. I had made up my mind by this time just what to do; so, as soon as the ceremony was over, I went straight to my father and told him the whole story.

"As I had expected, his rage was fearful, and I left his house, turned out of it forever, with only a few odds and ends of personal property to commence the fight for daily bread.

"I tried again and again to get a clerkship, or a post under government; but I feel sure now, as I did then, that some covert influence was exerted against me, and so I failed in every attempt to secure employment. There was only one thing left for me to do. I said good-bye to my dear wife, and, leaving her in the care of her aunt, who was in comfortable circumstances, though far from rich, I enlisted as a private soldier.

"I had carefully kept my troubles from you all this time, but as soon as I enlisted and found that my regiment was to go out at once to India, I thought it wrong to keep you in ignorance any longer.

"I felt the parting with my dear wife keenly, but at the same time I was glad to go in active service, for some of the native tribes were making trouble for us out there just then, and I felt confident that with a chance given me I could work my way up from the ranks; and that was the only hope I saw for our future comfort.

"Well, Phil, we reached India in due time, and went into quarters. There were no actual hostilities in our section just then, though they were constantly threatening. Inaction fretted me, but what was far worse was the fact that month after month rolled by without my hearing a word from my dear wife. In vain I wrote again and again; I never received a line in return. I grew desperate, and fell into bad ways and bad company. I got drunk, and was several times put under arrest—you see, I am making an honest confession—but I had grace enough left to be ashamed of myself all the time; and that is why I did not write to you, old boy—though, to be sure, I did write once, just after I arrived in India. But it seems you never got my letter. After things straightened out, I wrote you again and again in vain—"

"Our whole family had left the States, as I told you. That explains," I interpolated.

"Yes, that must have been it. My letters came back to me with the indorsement that your present address was unknown. You know I was always fond of animals, and so, one day, when I found a couple of natives torturing a poor little mongoose, I rescued it from them, and, carrying it home with me, nursed it until its wounds were completely cured.

"No one need ever tell me that animals are not capable of reason, of love and gratitude. By the time that Tonka was well, and I was ready to set him at liberty, he had become so attached to me that he was uneasy if I was out of his sight.

"He was never happy unless either settled on my shoulder or following close at my heels. He was so tame and gentle, and so useful in catching the mice, rats, lizards, and snakes that infested our barracks, that he became a general favorite.

"Well, one day, after the monthly mail came in, and, as usual, brought no letter for me, I tried, like the coward I was, to drown my sorrows in drink. The result was that I was arrested, severely reprimanded, and ordered to be shut up in the black hole—a dark, dungeon-like room, where obstreperous soldiers were confined. It had no windows, except high up on the wall were two little iron-slatted slits for ventilation.

"Half stupefied with drink, I heard the key turned in the lock, and then threw myself down on the floor, for bed there was none in the black hole.

"How long I had lain there I could never tell, but suddenly I came back to the consciousness that something cold and slimy was crawling over my left hand as it lay thrown outwards on the floor. I was wide awake and sobered on the in-

stant. I knew it was a snake, and had no doubt a poisonous one, for nine out of ten are deadly in their bite. I told myself that the only chance I had was to lie perfectly still, for if I moved ever so slightly the snake would strike its deadly fangs into my flesh—for a snake never strikes at an inanimate object, and that was what the creature evidently took me for.

"So by a tremendous effort I forced my muscles into quietude, while the terrible reptile crept slowly along, pausing every now and then, over my hand, up my arm, then over my face, and then, horror of horrors! it thrust its head inside my shirt, and, creeping inside, coiled itself up on my bare skin and settled down for a cozy nap, more oblivious than I was of the fact I was a human being. The cold beads of perspiration stood out on my forehead, and my heart beat like a hammer. I think it must have been that horrid thumping that disturbed the creature after awhile; for, after what seemed ages to me, it moved, lifted its head, looked warily around, then crept out, and coiled up again outside on my jacket.

"I felt that I could not bear this agony much longer. My feet and hands were momentarily growing colder and colder, and it was all I could do to keep my teeth from chattering together.

"I was fast becoming aware that my nerves would hold out but a few moments longer, when all at once, without a particle of noise heralding its approach, a dark object leaped downward and outward from one of the narrow windows and alighted on my chest. The startled snake made an answering spring, and then, freed from its horrible pressure, I raised my head, and saw my little Tonka in fierce combat with a cobra di capello, for my visitor was that most deadly of all reptiles. I knew then that I was saved, for Tonka, quick, active, skillful, never failed to kill and rend his enemies to pieces with his sharp teeth and claws.

"I realized that I was safe, and then I fainted away. The guard found me still insensible when he looked in some time after, Tonka sitting on my shoulder, uttering a mournful little cry, and the mangled remains of a cobra lying close by. I was ill for weeks, and it was not until I was almost recovered that I discovered that my hair had turned perfectly white during those moments of horror. I was sitting in the convalescent hospital one afternoon when my attention was aroused by a conversation between two of the surgeons.

"'It is odd, and no mistake,' said one. 'Colonel Brown will have to send it back to the writer. There is no Sir Henry Lacy anywhere in this section, so the letter can't be delivered to him. Yet it is directed to this regiment, and Colonel Brown's care, plainly enough; and it is a lawyer's document.'

"I sprang to my feet and approached the officers, forgetting my position, and that I enlisted under an assumed name.

"'It is for me—that letter. I am Henry Lacy. My father is, or was—for he must be dead, I fear—Sir John Lacy; but there was my elder brother—'

"'Sir John Lacy and his son Charles were both drowned by the capsizing of a yacht; this last mail brought the news. And you say you—'

"'Then I am in truth Sir Henry Lacy.'

"As you will believe, Phil, I found no difficulty in procuring my discharge, and then I hurried back to England, careless of title, fortune, estates, everything, except to learn the fate of my beloved wife. I found her, to my intense joy, just where I had left her, only mourning me as dead. She had not heard a word from me since my departure from England. Investigation revealed the fact that her trusted servant maid had been hired by my brother to intercept every letter passing between us.

"My wife intrusted to her the posting of her letters to me, and she always received mine from the postman, and they all went into the fire together.

"Tonka I brought home with me, of course. He saved my life, and Alice and I think there is nothing too good for him."

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